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Hit and Move:
Boxing and Belonging in Accra, Ghana

Leo Hopkinson

S0825996

PhD Thesis
Social Anthropology
The University of Edinburgh

2018

Declaration

Date:

I declare that, except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is entirely my own work and that no part of it has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signature:

Leo Hopkinson

For my parents, Richard and Julia.

In memory of
Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey
aka Allowey

Abstract

This thesis builds on 19 months of ethnographic fieldwork with the boxing community of Accra, Ghana. Having trained and competed alongside boxers in Ga Mashie, the area of central Accra strongly associated with the sport, I foreground an embodied understanding of the sport's sociality and of boxers' engagements with a global sporting industry.

The thesis is split into two parts: Part one examines the process of subject making through the mundane and quotidian practices of the sport – in training, during a bout and in boxers' lives outside the gym and the ring. I ask how boxers' sensory experience is morally encoded, and consider what ethical life looks like when violence is a necessary part of everyday life. Chapters one and two rethink care through pain; asking how painful interactions become moments of shared experience and affirmation, rather than moments of isolation and objectification. I argue that an ethic of care and an ethical orientation towards others emerge as primary concerns in boxers' lives. I theorise violence as neither necessarily affirming subjectivity nor objectifying, but as socially constructed to either affirm or objectify. Violence is thus inherently ambivalent and social rather than normatively objectifying, and practices of care responds to this ambivalence.

Part two concerns the boxing community's engagements with macro-imaginaries including a global sporting industry, the Ghanaian state, and the nation. I explore how embodied forms of movement and gendered understandings of self address the pervasive power dynamics which shape the boxing community's lives. Movement across the world to fight, alongside specific forms of movement through and around central Accra, articulate a sense of belonging between the boxing community and Ga Mashie which complicates contemporary understandings of ethnicity in Ghana. By understanding corporeal movement as creative and politically engaged I offer new perspectives on life in a world of myriad forms of connection, and concomitantly of emergent dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

Lay Summary

This thesis is based on 19 months of ethnographic research with the boxing community of Accra, Ghana. During this time, I trained as a boxer in Accra, lived with boxers, attended events, fights and meetings outside the gym, and conducted interviews with members of the boxing community. Boxing in Accra is strongly associated with the area of Ga Mashie in the centre of the city and with the Ga ethnic group. Much of my research took place in Ga Mashie. Throughout the thesis I reflect on what it means to associate a sport with a particular ethnic group, and how boxers and coaches understand this ethnic-association to shape their lives and work.

The thesis is split into two parts. Part one is based largely on data about training in the gym, preparing for fight nights and competing. In part one I explore how the boxing community understand their sport as both beneficial and harmful, often through an ambivalent relationship with violence. I suggest that not all violent interactions in the sport are about dominating or beating another person. Instead, the boxing community understand their work in the gym and the ring often through ideas of care and help. This emphasis on care leads me to ask what care is, and I come to an understanding of care and violence as related concepts which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In part one I also consider how the emphasis on violent and physical forms of care in the sport contradicts normal family relations, particularly those between brothers. I consider why it is a problem for brothers to box one another competitively and explore how the boxing community go about avoiding situations where brothers might possibly compete. I use this discussion to reflect on what separates family relations from other forms of social relationship, and ask what makes family special as a way of relating to others.

Part two of this thesis reflects on boxers' lives in the global boxing industry: how they make decisions about travelling to work in the sport, and how they imagine a global sporting industry which is based in distant locations such as the USA and the UK. I consider how widespread stereotypes about race and masculinity shape the opportunities for work abroad which are available to boxers, and explore how boxers reflect on taking up offers of employment based on negative and harmful stereotypes. In the final two chapters, I ask how particular forms of walking and running in Accra are a way for the boxing community to reflect on the relationships of power which operate around them; in particular, the idea of a global industry dominated by financial powers in Europe and North America, and their

relationship with the Ghanaian state. I suggest that the physical process walking is a way of engaging with and reflecting on global and national relations of power, rather than simply a mode of transport from place to place. I conclude the thesis by thinking about how these two sections both speak to the experience of being connected to other places and people, and what it means to be excluded from, or included in, global flows and relationships of care.

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I would not have had the opportunity to complete this project without the support of the Economic and Social Research Council, for which I am extremely grateful.

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Introduction

I find myself stood beside the ring, leaning on one of the two steel poles that support the patchwork roof of the Attoh Quarshie boxing gym. The gym is perched above the beach in the South Western corner of Ga Mashie, the Ga town which became the centre of the colonial city of Accra and which is now a low-income suburb of the city synonymous with boxing. It is 3:30pm on a weekday afternoon; the heat is oppressive and the air in the gym is close with the sour smell of sweat and leather. Twenty or so boxers and coaches are assembled around the ring, their attention focused on a tangle of bodies between the ropes. We are watching two young men fight and at this moment in time one (shorter and stockier) lays sprawled on his back on the floor, desperately trying to cover his face as the other (taller and more slight) stands over him in an awkward half crouch, whirling his fists wildly towards the other. Around me, the room erupts with cheers; faces and palms are raised upwards and the room resounds with shouts of '*ma le!*' (Ga - 'hit him!'). The boxers hang off the ring ropes hooting and laughing. I stare in a post-training malaise, propped up by the pole, smiling.

After a brief period of cagey circling at the start of the fight, both boxers had charged across the ring and tried to batter each other as quickly as possible. In doing so they showed little of the refined technique of the gym's experienced proponents, among them several continental and world champions who stand among the audience. Hilarity promptly ensued for the "crowd". The "referee" was a professional boxer named Ofei, a slaughter-man by trade whose broad smile reveals several missing teeth. During the bout, Ofei mockingly admonished the boxers for slapping and thumping one another and stopped the fight completely at one point in order to theatrically deduct a point for repeated blows "below the belt". This was done with the same solemn ritual of a high-profile bout; the "referee" took the offender's hand and presented him to each side of the ring, a single finger held aloft as he did so to indicate the point being deducted. With no "judges" appointed, the deduction amounted to nothing more than a performance but drew cheers and boos from the watching "crowd". As the two boxers re-joined the fray, Ofei's smile widened with the pleasure of a successful parody.

After a subtle wave from Washington, the head coach of the Attoh Quarshie, Ofei hauled Osu

(the taller) off Malam (the shorter) where he lay curled in a ball on the ring floor. The latter picked himself up, a little dazed but undamaged. Osu, exhausted from his exertion, stumbled across the ring to his “corner” where he was met with adulation by his “cornermen”. Ironically it was Osu who seemed barely able to walk after the bout. Malam wore a sheepish smile and Osu's chest heaved while the spongy head-guards and gloves were wrenched off the boxers' now passive bodies. As the adrenaline receded a look of confusion washed over Osu's face. “Why is everyone laughing?” it seemed to say.

The scene described above is an initiation into the gym community. Fights between novices occurred whenever new recruits joined the gym. After paying the joining fee of 50 Ghana Cedis (around 12 US dollars at the time) and a crate of soft drinks to be shared among the gym members, new recruits would be matched with one another after a month or so of training.¹ New members of the Attoh Quarshie only ever have one such fight. Initiation bouts are a burlesque coordinated by experienced practitioners, yet unbeknown to the key protagonists – the “boxers” in the ring. The burlesque turns on the exaggerated production of a boxing match by proficient boxers, while the match itself is between “boxers” with little formal training, an evident lack of skill and clearly little understanding of the sport. By virtue of everything that it is not, the burlesque highlights the shared values and ethical orientation of the gym community.

During these fights the gym membership enthusiastically play the roles of coaches, corner men, referee, judges and crowd. Each novice is appointed a “corner” - consisting of a coach and an assistant (both experienced boxers). A referee is nominated by Washington, the head coach of the Attoh Quarshie, from among the gym's experienced professional boxers. The two novices are prepared with Vaseline to the face, a mouth guard inserted if they have one, their hands thrust into foamy sparring gloves and a head guard rammed onto them by their “corner men”. They are then help into the ring, comically massaged around the shoulders and excessively fanned with a towel by their “corner men”, who offer their charges a deliberately bewildering stream of tactical instructions. Instructions are issued from a store of generic pre-fight advice and include pearls of wisdom such as “watch him carefully”, “don't rush”, “be calm, double jab” and “hit and move”, all delivered with a theatrical sense of urgency. The parody is so obvious that the “corner men” often slip between the exaggerated

¹ If there were no other new recruits available, they would either wait until one joined, or would be matched with another relative novice already in training.

performance of the serious coach and shared laughter with the “crowd”.

What then happens is typically an unstructured, unbridled and often short-lived attempt by each “boxer” to physically damage the other. The whirling arms, nervous energy, confusion and adrenaline-fuelled exhaustion which fill the 3 x 3 minute rounds are a huge source of entertainment for the onlookers. Yet, rather than being a cruel joke at the expense of the initiates, these bouts serve a more constructive purpose. They affirm the gym membership as a community of shared knowledge and understanding. Initiation bouts highlight the gulf in ethical orientation, embodied skill and social understanding between those who practice the sport and those who do not.

The burlesque is funny because the torrents of tactical information, the careful processes of preparation administered upon the boxer’s body prior to the bout (hand-wrapping, Vaseline application, glove-lacing etc.) and the judicious application of rules by a strict “referee” are lost on the “boxers”. The “boxers” misunderstanding is embodied in their poor technique, contravention of rules, and the disjuncture between their desire to physically damage one another and their evident lack of the skills required to do so. What is being parodied is the idea that a boxing match is simply a “fight”, the only aim of which is the physical domination of the other through the exercise of violence.

Like any burlesque, the comedy turns on undermining a purportedly serious subject. To those who appreciate the gravity of the subject matter, the hamming-up and perversion of burlesque is what makes it funny. Boxers and coaches were often at pains to remind me that:

Boxing is not a joke.

You don’t play at boxing.

Everything in boxing is real, it’s not a game.

The Ga language too impresses the gravity of the sport; the verb for boxing is *no* – to fight, whereas one might *tswa boolu* – play football. Ofei's over-played portrayal of the referee's role and the "crowd's" roar of approval when the "boxers" broke the rules highlight that it is not only boxers' technical ability, but the capacity to encounter the violence of the sport as ethically nuanced and socially inflected which delineates the gym community. This thesis explores the nuances of sociality and community in the context of a sport which is understood to be fundamentally and necessarily violent and dangerous.

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Two themes emerge from this vignette which frame the two parts of this thesis. The first is that the violence and physicality of boxing is socially nuanced and meaningful. The second is the importance of movement and mobility to the Accra boxing community. Part one of the thesis addresses what it means to hit and get hit - how meaning is made through the violence and attrition of the sport. Part two addresses the multiple forms of mobility which characterise the boxing family's lives in the sport. Whether travelling to distant countries to compete, moving in the ring, or moving through and around Ga mashie, mobility facilitates encounters with, and expressions of, power and agency. Movement is a way of knowing and a way of being for the boxing family.

I begin part one by exploring the gap in understanding which initiation fights highlight. This gap makes the fight between Osu and Malam a burlesque rather than a scene of grotesque joy in the spectacle of unbridled violence between two young men. I trace the sociality of boxing as a corporeal and attritional practice and in doing so explore how boxers understand themselves as relational and dependent subjects whose lives and futures are intertwined. Central to the sociality of boxing in Accra is an ethic of care, and an ethical orientation towards others. I do not wish to talk-around or explain-away the violence of the sport through a rhetoric of care, dependence and mutuality. Rather, these concepts are relevant precisely because the sport is violent and attritional. In part one of the thesis I explore how the violence of boxing looms large in the lives of my interlocutors, as a necessary but problematic aspect of lives lived through the sport.

Part two analyses the macro-relations of power which shape the lives of the Accra boxing community, through accounts of movement and mobility in boxers' lives. The boxing community are strikingly globally mobile; regular international travel is a feature of many boxers and coaches lives and a realisable aspiration of many more. Similarly, movement around and through the city of Accra is central to the community's everyday routines; they move to-and-from training, complete their "road work" on routes which snake through and around the city, are transported across and around the city and country to box in front of new audiences and move between the many gyms in Accra to spar, observe potential opponents, meet friends, business partners and colleagues. Different forms of mobility pervade the boxing family's lives. I examine three forms of mobility as a way of interrogating the relationships of power in the lives of a community which is both engaged in a global industry, and socio-spatially rooted to a particular part of Accra - Ga Mashie. The boxing family's various mobilities are a window onto the relationships of power and subordination which shape their lives, and the ways in which they exercise agency in the face of these relations.

My analysis builds on just under two years of ethnographic fieldwork with the Accra boxing family. The "boxing family" is used widely by my interlocutors to describe the constellation of actors actively involved with the sport in Accra. The family includes active and former boxers and coaches associated with specific gyms, and also to those in more peripatetic (but no less essential) roles; referees and judges, promoters, managers and professional association members. The "boxing family" is a self-recognised entity, if not one of rigid membership. I explore the implications of this kinship metaphor throughout this introduction and thesis. The vast majority of the family are affiliated in one way or another with a specific gym, and as such the gyms form both the physical and social structure of the boxing family.

Gyms as Social Structure

There is a cliché in the international boxing community, one as prevalent in Accra as it is in Edinburgh or Montreal (Hopkinson 2015), or at ringside interviews broadcast from any number of international fight-nights and press-conferences: "The fight is won in the gym" goes the received wisdom. The network of gyms which are concentrated around Ga mashie,

the ethnically Ga neighbourhood of Accra synonymous with boxing, are central to this thesis. Ga Mashie is approximately a square mile on the coast of Accra (see fig. 1). It is the old colonial centre of the city and is bordered to the south by the sea, to the west by Korle Lagoon and to the north by the train-station and an area of wasteland (see fig. 2). There are 41 boxing gyms in Accra, of which 25 are in Ga Mashie. Outside Ga Mashie, no other neighbourhood of equivalent size has more than four gyms. Gyms are the nodes around which the boxing community is structured both socially and spatially. To explain their centrality to the sociality of the boxing family I introduce the Attoh Quarshie boxing gym, from which vantage point I conducted my research.

The gyms form a network through which the sport is organised. Each gym is a notionally separate entity, is staffed by separate coaches and has a separate stable of boxers. Boxers are considered to be “at” one gym or another, are registered with that gym and sporadically pay modest “club fees” as part of their membership. When competing, amateur boxers are announced as affiliated with a particular gym, and amateur bouts are often organised by the coaches of separate gyms (see chapter three). Likewise, professional boxers are affiliated with a single gym and, when they fight, are attended in the corner by the coaches of that gym. Both amateur and professional boxers trained at and were affiliated with only one gym. Similarly, coaches worked and were considered “at” one gym or another.² During my fieldwork I was a member of the Attoh Quarshie boxing gym. The Attoh Quarshie is named after its founder and benefactor, Joshua Attoh Quarshie, a lawyer who founded the gym in the late 1990s and financed it until his death in the mid-2000s. I trained there between 3 and 5 times a week and the membership of the Attoh Quarshie shaped my access to the boxing family.

² Some lee-way was made here regarding the training of the national amateur team, the Back Bombers, and the armed forces/police boxing squads. These teams also trained separately as part of institutionally affiliated boxing clubs, but many remained affiliated with and “at” a non-state sponsored gym.

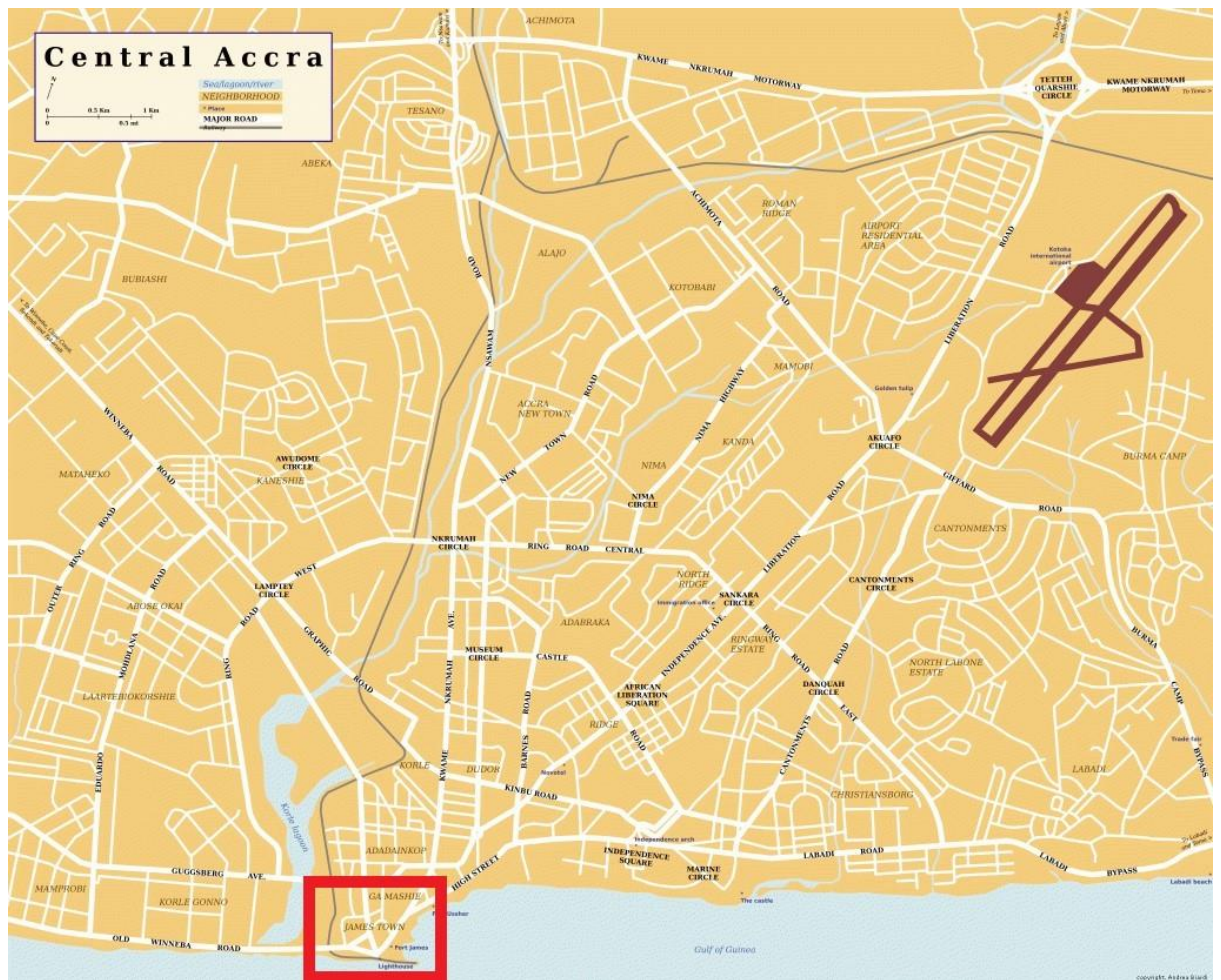


Fig. 1 Map of Accra showing Ga Mashie outlined in red.

Gyms are run by a hierarchical coaching team. A head coach will often be responsible for structuring training, coaching experienced professionals and representing the gym at meetings of the GBA (Ghana Boxing Authority – the governing body of the professional sport) or the GABF (the Ghana Amateur Boxing Federation – the governing body of the amateur sport). A head coach is typically supported by several junior coaches who are also ranked in seniority. When I began training at the Attoh Quarshie the coaching staff numbered five who were (in order of seniority): Allowey – the veteran head coach, Washington – Allowey’s assistant who was largely responsible for the day-to-day running of daily training sessions and the management of boxers, Osman – Washington’s assistant who supervised the gym when Washington or Allowey were away, Korley – junior to Osman and responsible for timekeeping in the gym (calling out the three-minute rounds which structure training), and Sowah – also junior to Osman, who worked mostly with novice boxers. Sadly, Allowey died in early 2016 after a prolonged period of ill health during which he was often away from the

gym. As a result, Washington was acting head coach for much of the time I trained at the Attoh Quarshie and he assumed the role fully after Allowey's death. Of the remaining four coaches only Sowah had ever been an active boxer, boxing on the national amateur team in the 1980s and 1990s before a shoulder injury ended his career prematurely. Washington, Osman and Korley all began coaching by 'carrying bags' for experienced boxers to and from training, and then 'changing buckets' – emptying the spit buckets in the corner of the ring - the most junior job in the gym. From there, they learned to coach from the incumbent coaches and became more senior as others left.

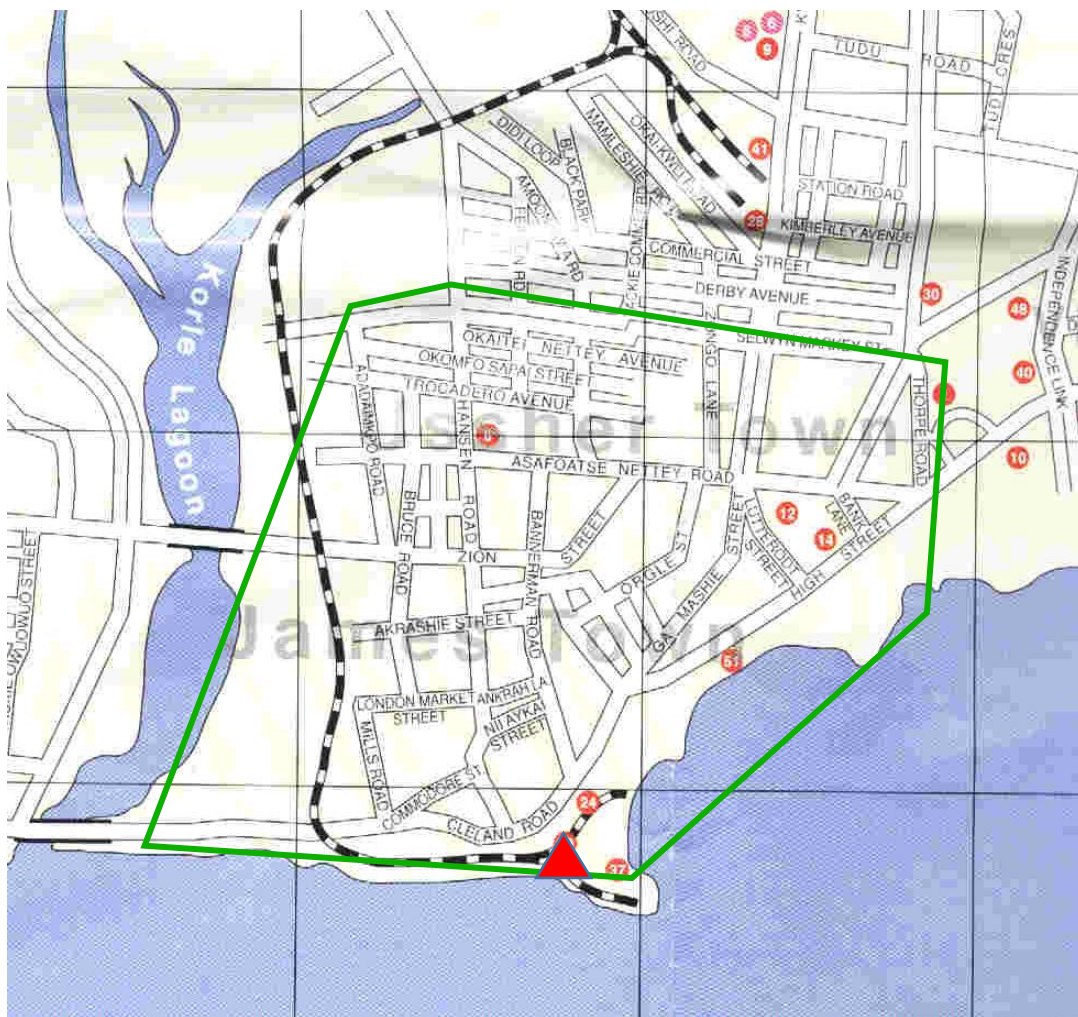


Fig. 2 – Ga Mashie outlined in Green, Attoh Quarshie marked as a red triangle.

Although coaches notionally run and have authority in the gym, what money they make through the sport comes when they are employed by professional boxers. Coaches are paid a cut of the “purse” (the boxer’s fee for fighting) by the professional boxers they coach, and

the proportions of this cut depend on the coach's position in the gym's coaching hierarchy. Amateur boxers' "club fees" are usually so paltry and so often missed that they afford little in the way of a regular income. This leaves the somewhat curious situation of the coach/employee being in control of the gym, training routines and often in a position of moral authority; while the boxer/employer is under the authority of their employee, the coach. Coaches are dependent on boxers for any income, while boxers are simultaneously dependent on coaches for the services they provide. As a result, dynamics of hierarchy, authority and dependence within the gym community are complex and non-linear.

The Attoh Quarshie is a relatively large gym with a membership of over forty boxers, and regularly twenty or more boxers will train together each afternoon. Unlike the South Chicago gym which Loic Wacquant describes as a 'quintessentially masculine space' which excludes women (2004: 38), the Accra boxing community includes women in all its various roles – as boxers, coaches, referees and judges, promoters and managers. While spaces were often predominantly male-occupied, women were not excluded from active participation in training, organising or promoting boxing. None of the coaches or referees I spoke to voiced opposition to women training at their gyms or competing. Indeed, some of the most successful boxers - those who travelled most and fought for the most prestigious titles available - are women. Women and men trained together, and rather than being split by gender, exercises were allocated by weight-class. Among the Attoh Quarshie's most successful professionals was Helen Joseph, a former world champion from Nigeria who lived and trained in Accra during my fieldwork and emigrated to the USA to train full time in late 2016. Despite this, boxing is not without gendered inflection. The sport is historically constructed as a masculine route to social inclusion through martial participation in Accra (see History and Context section, Akyeampong 2002, Dunzendorfer 2013). I discuss in chapter four how gendered subjectivities are lived through the sport in relation to tropes of masculinity and locally embedded gender roles.

Although boxing is strongly associated with the Ga ethnic group (Akyeampong 2002, Dunzendorfer 2011, 2013), fewer than half of the boxers I worked with were patrilineally Ga, patrilineage being the normative mode of establishing Ga ethnicity. Many boxers are instead first or second generation migrants to the city from other parts of Ghana and West African. By contrast, the majority of the coaches I know are patrilineally Ga. Throughout this thesis I argue that a sense of belonging between the sport and Ga Mashie is constructed among the

boxing community at the intersection of practice, body and place rather than through understandings of ethnicity or patrilineage. This sense of belonging eludes the Ghanaian government's rigid understanding of ethnicity, and similarly static uses of the concept in the social sciences. I discuss the construction of belonging and Ga-ness among the boxing family extensively in chapter six.

Coaches from different gyms often know one another well, spend a lot of time visiting one another and hold weekly meetings in the courtyard outside the Attoh Quarshie. They are peers of a similar age - mostly men between 35 and 55, and the vast majority were born and grew up in central Accra. Coaches regularly visit one another's gyms and much of Washington's day was made up of trips to discuss a particular boxer with another coach or to watch sparring at another gym. The gyms occupy static, material localities and their density in Ga Mashie engrains the sport into the topography of the neighbourhood.

Boxers from the same gym rarely compete in bouts against one another. Indeed, much effort goes into ensuring that this is avoided wherever possible, often by strategically managing weight categories to avoid the potential for matches. Professionals from the same gym only ever boxed one another in exhibition bouts³, and competitive bouts between professionals from the same gym never happened during my time in Accra. When amateur boxers from the same gym did compete against one another, this was often done under alternative affiliations. For example, although two boxers may have begun boxing at the Attoh Quarshie one may now be a part of the "Black Bombers" squad (the national amateur team), and this different affiliation would be listed on the programme for the evening. Matchmaking requires careful thought and planning, and the logic behind matchmaking reveals a great deal about the ethical imperatives of different forms of relationship within and outside the boxing family. I explore the matchmaking process as a window onto these relationships in chapter three.

The gyms provide a structure for affiliation, coaching, matchmaking and differentiation of parties. Although the gyms are part of a network, their mutual-exclusion allows competition to take place between protagonists who can only be affiliated to a single gym. In this sense, the gyms highlight a central feature of part one of this thesis; the tension that pervades boxing between relationality and dependence on the one hand, and individual autonomy

³ A form of non-competitive bout that I discuss at length in chapter two.

and violent competition on the other. The network of gyms, rather than any one gym in particular, is at the heart of the boxing family. Gyms are related to one another through their relative stables of boxers - who may or may not represent suitable opponents or sparring partners, their coaches - who may be competitors, friends, family, antagonists, business partners and their relative location among the topography of the city as I discuss in chapter five. The gyms form a framework of social and spatial nodes around which the fluid entity of the boxing family crystallises.

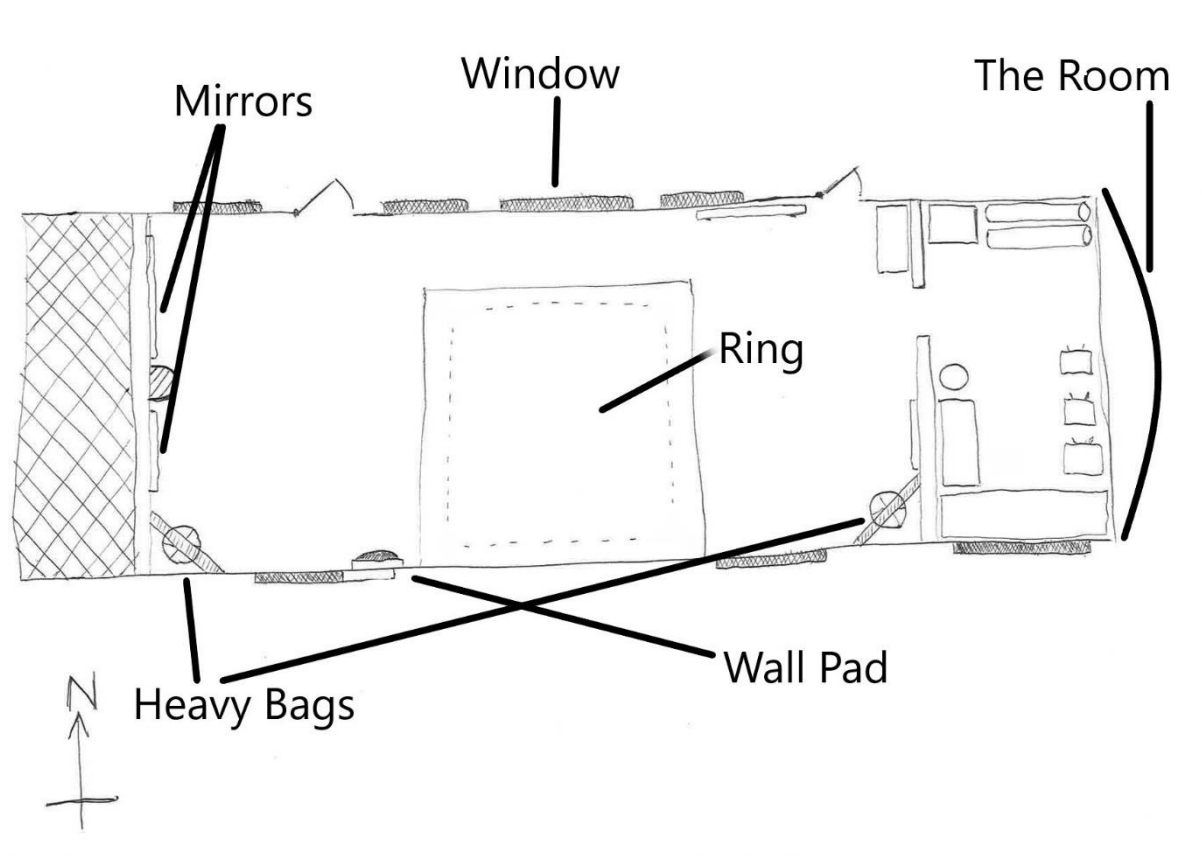


Fig. 3 Interior plan of the Attoh Quarshie Boxing Gym

Inside the gym

Although the Attoh Quarshie shares features with many Accra gyms it is somewhat better resourced than most others. The gym occupies a small rectangular building in the south-west corner of Ga Mashie. The building is some 150 meters West of Jamestown Lighthouse, the

candy-striped tower which is the most prominent topographical feature of the neighbourhood.

The Attoh Quarshie has two doors, one at either end of a rectangular building (see fig. 3). Aperture windows with shutters but no glazing line the front and back walls, allowing a salty breeze to blow in from the sea to the south and out into the courtyard to the north. Stepping inside, the centre of the space is dominated by a ring raised approximately a foot off the concrete floor. A rusting steel post stands in each corner of the ring and three ropes link the posts; one shin-high, one waist-high and one shoulder-high. Immediately to the right of the ring is a “wall-pad”, a densely padded pillow attached to the south wall designed to be punched. A heavy punch-bag hangs from a steel tube cemented into the wall in each of the south-west and south-east corners. The west wall hosts two large mirrors, again running from knee-to-head height. The mirrors are glass but their reflective backing has begun to corrode in the saline air, leaving a patchy image punctuated by brown rust stains. In-between the mirrors on the west wall a semi-circular frame juts out perpendicular to the wall just above head height. On the lower side is a bracket and sometimes, when the gym has one, a leather speed-ball is hung from the bracket and bounced against the board with a loud, rhythmic rattle. Beyond the west wall the building continues into a separate space, rented from Accra Metropolitan Assembly (the city council) by a man not affiliated with the gym.

Behind the east wall of the gym is a changing-come-storage room known simply as ‘the room’. The room is the same depth as the gym but only a few meters wide. It hosts the gym’s collection of spare gloves, pads, head-guards, groin guards and a stack of old punch bags. Besides the gear, several tables and chairs line room and everything is caked in a thick layer of black dust which blows in as rubbish and the waste from the nearby slaughter-house is burned on the beach. The room also hosts the gym’s set of mechanical scales which are carefully shrouded in a thick, tarpaulin cover after each use. The scales are the only item in the gym which escapes the dust.

Many other gyms are less well-equipped than this and less than half have a fixed ring of their own. However, most have at least a single heavy bag, often a wall pad and a locked storage area or “club room” where equipment and scales are stored.⁴ The Attoh Quarshie is a

⁴ This has changed recently with the building of several new boxing facilities in the run-up to the 2016 election. However, these new training spaces are, as far as I am aware, not considered “gyms”

relatively small space, with the main gym floor being only twenty meters long and five deep. Inside, the space is dusty, dark and close. My analysis begins in this space and moves outwards.

Training

Training at the Attoh Quarshie is held Monday – Friday from 2 - 4pm, although many other gyms begin training around 4pm. Korley explained that the heat of the afternoon increases the intensity of training and makes Attoh Quarshie boxers fitter than others. Before training, Osman opens the gym at 1:45pm. Novice and young boxers arrive early to sweep the space and fill a stack of plastic water-bottles from a nearby spigot. Before 2pm boxers arrive from work or home and change in the room, before assembling on the floor and awaiting Washington or Osman's instruction to begin warming up at 2pm.

Training begins with a group warm-up consisting of five minutes of stretching, five minutes of plyometric exercises on the spot (jumping, hopping, star-jumps etc.) and a ten-minute jog. What follows is a mixture of shadow-boxing, hitting heavy bags, sparring and pad-work to improve technique and fitness. Finally, sessions finish with a period of strength and conditioning exercises which include timed running, body-weight exercises such as push-ups, pull-ups, skipping and various abdominal exercises. Amateur and professional boxers often warm-up together before being divided during the technique-specific punching drills such as pad-work and sparring, and re-joining as a group for strength and conditioning exercises. Within these sub-sessions boxers are divided by weight, as they are in competition. For example, middle-to-heavy-weight boxers might hit the heavy bags while welter-weight-and-below boxers might spar. The material and skilled body is a key way of grouping and defining boxers, and central to drawing comparisons and similarities between them. Aside from the distinction between amateur and professional, weight and skill as delineating factors are always relative. Given the continual division and subdivision of boxers in training, boxers come to have a keen awareness of their relative skill, size and experience within the gym

but rather facilities where the national team or other gym groups might train occasionally, if they can secure access.

community. This awareness of self in relation to others shapes understandings of ethical behaviour in the gym, the ring and beyond.

During training Washington often stood on the ring skirt shouting instructions and encouragement at boxers “working” on the gym floor. Korley habitually stands in the south-east corner of the ring and keeps time with a stopwatch around his neck. From the end of the warm-up onward the entire session is punctuated by the rhythmic call of “Box!” at the start of each three-minute round, “time!” three minutes later and “Ready, Box!” after a thirty second break. This rhythm of three-minutes-on and thirty-seconds-off punctuated all work in the Attoh Quarshie, as it did in gyms across the city.

During training, the gym is a hive of activity. After Korley calls “box!”, boxers circle the heavy bags in twos or threes taking it in turn to throw punches, or at other times rotate onto the bag in turn for ten seconds of constant punching each. The floor spaces either side of the ring are often filled with boxers shadow-boxing; hissing sharp bursts of out-breath as they throw punches into the air and move as if fighting imaginary opponents. Osman, Washington and Korley march around watching, administering advice and instruction and shouting at the boxers to “work!”. The space is carefully ordered and moved around in relation to the various pieces of equipment hung on the walls, and to the other boxers working at their various stations. Moving in the gym during training, by virtue of its small size and the relatively large number of occupants, is movement with and around other bodies engaged in activities of their own. Coaches constantly encourage an awareness of other bodies and the space between and around boxers in training. Developing this relative spatial awareness is a central part of training.

Aside from the equipment-based exercises outlined above, pair-based work is an extensive part of boxers training. Pair work includes fitness training, tag-based games aimed at touching a partners’ shoulders, knees or buttocks without being touched oneself and a wide range of contact—based sparring and antagonistic boxing exercises. Pair work demands a refined knowledge of others relative skill and experience, and a nuanced understanding of the different tacit rules and aims which shape the different contact-based games and drills. These conventions and aims differ dramatically with the varying physical intensity and attrition of pair-based exercises. Boxers are constantly actively training *with* one another and the aims and conventions of exercises recognise the interactive nature of training; whether

working as a group to warm up, moving around and with one another in the gym space or conducting pair-based exercises or sparring. In this sense, boxers are dependent on one another in training and explicitly acknowledge that their training is facilitated by others. The interactive and dependent nature of training is also very physically intimate. This is perhaps most clear when boxers finish a session by massaging one another in pairs, although a massage is arguably no less intimate than the physicality of sparring.

The gym is also a site of attrition, physicality and pain. The Attoh Quarshie is nicknamed “the house of pain” and gym members often shout out the call-and-response motif of “no pain” – “no gain”, “no gain” – “without pain” as they train. The infliction and experience of pain in the gym is a deeply nuanced and fundamentally social experience. Pain and suffering are often spoken about and theorised explicitly during, after and before training. Coaches encourage boxers to “endure” the physicality of the sport and to “feel” their training as they pace the floor. The language of pain developed in the gym distinguishes between *sha*, *pila* and *wo ehe* – three different but interconnected ways of describing pain, each of which relates to the sociality and mutual dependence of training in a different way. Pain is constructed as transactional, social and potentially affirming in the gym. However, the physicality and attrition of the sport is simultaneously recognised to be dangerous, violent and damaging. Part one of the thesis explores these dependent, painful and violent relations, and examines how subjects are constructed and articulated through the attrition of boxing.

Beyond the gym

Outside the gym, boxers’ training consisted of daily “roadwork” (jogging and running), a notionally regimented lifestyle of abstinence from alcohol, limited sex, a modest diet and regulated sleep and rest. In practice, boxers observed this lifestyle sporadically, often depending whether they had an impending fight and were concerned with ‘making weight’ – managing their weight so as to arrive at their designated weight when officially weighed on the morning of a bout. In practice ‘making weight’ often meant dramatically reducing weight by limiting food intake, running and in urgent cases when a great deal of weight needed to be lost quickly, through dramatic dehydration. Boxers regularly lost more than 10% of their weight in the weeks prior to a bout, and it was not uncommon for a boxer to lose 5kg or more in the day or two prior to a weigh-in. Boxing is a lifestyle commitment which

extends beyond the gym for boxers, coaches and other peripatetic members of the boxing family. As such, it intersects with and impacts upon other aspects of boxers' lives.

Despite boxing demanding significant commitment outside the gym, the boxing family is (of course) enmeshed in relations and social structures beyond the sport. For some like coach Alloway, the sport and the boxing family come to play a central role in their lives and personhood. I explore how belonging and personhood are articulated by the boxing family in chapter 6. However, for others like Osu and Malam (the novices in my opening vignette) boxing remains only a part of life and shapes experience to a lesser extent. Boxing represents the sole source of employment and income for very few people. Almost all boxers have alternative means of employment outside the sport. They are mechanics, slaughter-men, market vendors, shop-keepers, carpenters and builders; all alongside their work as coaches, promoters and boxers. It is only those few, most financially successful boxers who can afford not to "hustle" as several of my interlocutors described their employment. Despite its purported glamour, professional boxing offers few financial rewards for the vast majority of its practitioners (cf. Wacquant 2004, 1998). "Purses" earned by fighting must also pay a boxer's manager and coaches and maintain training equipment. The distribution of monies after a fight is often highly contentious. As others have noted, with the intimacy and trust of kinship and relations of dependence comes the propensity for dangerous forms of violence and betrayal (Geschiere 2013, 1997). Similarly, the non-linear and complex relations of dependence and hierarchy in the boxing community are potentially dangerous and leave boxers and coaches vulnerable to exploitation. As a result, the boxing family is riddled with tensions over unfairly distributed purses and suspicions of selfishness and self-interest. Boxing as a form of employment is precarious, dependent on a fragile body and achieved through a network of intimate yet unstable social relations. Throughout this thesis I explore the variety of roles which boxing takes in my interlocutor's lives and draw as much on those who have a less profound engagement with the sport as I do on those whose lives are lived entirely through it.

Social relations within the boxing family often imply hierarchies of skill, experience, wealth and age. Likewise, kinship relations are often prominent in boxers' sense of self, and in Ghana (as elsewhere) often come with specific material and social obligations and expectations (van der Geest 2013, Fortes 1969, Goody 1973). Kinship relations offer a route into the sport for many, meaning that the boxing family is cross-cut by many kinship relations. I explore the

way that the expectations and ethics of kinship intersects with the sociality of the sport in potentially problematic ways in chapters three, four and six. The tension between understandings of relatedness on the one hand, and the relationality of being a boxer emerges at these intersections and the metaphorical quality of the boxing family becomes clear. Chapters five and six examine this metaphor by considering how spatial-practices of kinship are appropriated and practiced by the boxing family as they occupy the space of Ga Mashie, and as they play central roles (which traverse kinship and non-kinship mortuary roles) in the burial and commemoration of members of the boxing community. The metaphor of the boxing family allows some critical purchase on the question of what kinship is (cf. Sahlins 2013, Carsten 2014, Goody 1973, Fortes 1969) and how the sociality of kinship is delineated from other forms of relational being.

Global engagement

The Accra boxing community is strikingly globally mobile and actively engaged in the global boxing industry: during the relatively brief period of my fieldwork, boxers and coaches from Accra travelled across six continents to ply their trade. In most of these cases travellers returned to Ghana, although I was aware of rumours of official and irregular migration through the sport. More prominent, perhaps, was a widespread sense that visa-issuing offices of foreign countries were so paranoid about boxers' using the sport as a means to irregular migration that they were reluctant to give Ghanaian boxers visa, and thus limited boxers' capacity to work abroad despite legitimate offers of work. On their travels, boxers and coaches participated at the highest levels of the sport – several challenging for professional world titles or competing at the Olympics, pan-African champions and amateur world championships. However, many more travelled for less prestigious competitions, titles and bouts.

Over the last forty years Ghana has been home to 8 world champions, most recently Isaac Dogboe who won a world championship in New York in May of 2018. Global mobility, prominence and recognition in a global industry is a tangible goal for the boxing family, albeit not one which is necessarily achievable by all. I examine boxers' experiences of the global industry in chapter four and five.

While Ga Mashie provides a migratory starting point for some boxers, with popular destinations including North America, the UK and Australasia, Ga Mashie is also a migratory destination for boxers. During my fieldwork boxers from the US, the UK, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Benin, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Namibia, Cameroon, Korea, Argentina, Mexico (and no doubt other countries I was unaware of) came to Accra both to train and compete. Ga Mashie is not only a migratory starting point but a destination or stopping point en-route to the boxing super-powers (both economic and talent-wise) of the US and western Europe for many.

Further complicating the idea of sub-Saharan African countries as migratory starting points for athletic labour in increasingly neoliberal sporting industries (Besnier 2015, Besnier & Brownell 2012, Esson 2013), a number of successful boxers choose to live and train in Accra rather than abroad. One notable example is Joshua Clottey, a former welterweight world champion who, having lived in New York, had chosen to relocate back to Ghana to continue his career and training at the Attoh Quarshie despite having the financial resources to reside in the US. Joshua cited the idea of training in 'rich' areas as detrimental to his skill and fitness as a boxer, and in doing so references a globally prevalent narrative which entwines skill and success in boxing with poverty (Wacquant 2004, Woodward 2015). As they aspire towards and realise engagements with the global industry, the boxing family encounter power dynamics purportedly characteristic of a "global" neoliberal age (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000). In part two of this thesis I consider how different forms of movement by the boxing community offer a critical window onto transnational relations of power. I now introduce six pairs of linked concepts which frame my ethnography and analysis.

Key Concepts

Violence and Subjectivity

The burlesque which began this thesis parodies its subject's solemnity, a solemnity based on the boxing family's understanding that the sport is violent and dangerous. The parody works because the protagonists (the two novices) lack the technical skill to effectively inflict

violence upon one another, and the knowledge to know when and why it might be appropriate (or inappropriate) to do so. The mirror image of this parody points to the violence of boxing being both an embodied technique (Wacquant 2004) and an ethical practice. Boxers who suffer from the long-term consequences of repeated head trauma are well known in central Accra, and others whose careers have been cut short by injury and illness inflicted through the sport are similarly widely recognised. An awareness of the body as finite, fragile and constantly degraded by the inherent attrition of the sport forms the backdrop to lives lived through boxing. However, much of the violence, risk and danger of the sport is inflicted or presented by people within the family – training partners, coaches, opponents from within the community, managers and in some cases relatives - rather than by outside forces or agents. Violence and risk are central to many relationships among the boxing family, and as a result everyday life is not lived in spite of exceptional violence (Das 2007), but through practices and relations which themselves are inherently violent and dangerous.

To make sense of a community which is formed through, rather than in spite of, violence I consider anthropological approaches to violence as objectifying on the one hand, and as a relationship which forms particular subjectivities on the other. These approaches help to understand the boxing family's ambivalent relationship with violence as both affirmative and objectifying. I then consider how ethical life is engrained in everyday practice (Das 2007, 2014, Lambek 2014) rather than in dramatic moments of rupture and virtue, and consider how these quotidian practices are often understood as care and help.

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois propose a violence continuum which 'refers to the ease with which humans are capable of reducing the socially vulnerable into expendable nonpersons and assuming the license – even the duty – to kill, maim, or soul-murder' (2004: 19). Their interest lies in how violence is legitimised in its diverse forms, and in the cultural process which mediate the shift between 'the routine ordinary and normative violence of everyday life' and the 'sudden eruptions of extraordinary, pathological, excessive or "gratuitous" violence.' (2004: 5). Although Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois acknowledge that violence is an ill-defined concept, their work implies that violence is a process of objectifying and de-humanising an "other". Although acts of violence may be shrouded in cultural logics which make them acceptable or apparently justified, violence remains a process of objectification.

By way of contrast, Kleinman et. al (1998) and Das et. al (2000) explore how subjects emerge in and through moments of violence. They examine the role of large-scale social actors such as states, extra-state bodies and global media, alongside global flows of capital, persons and images, in creating the circumstances under which violence exists in the day-to-day lives of local communities (2000: 2), and ask how communities live through this violence. From these perspectives violence not only objectifies but forms specific affective experiences of being in the world, subjectivities which reflect the relations of power within which they exist (Das et. al 2000). I draw on both these approaches to illuminate how the boxing community live through, rather than in spite of, the sport's violence. As they train, fight and travel the world to compete the violence of boxing is understood both as a way of bringing subjects into being and simultaneously as potentially objectifying. My interlocutors' work in striking a balance between affirmation and objectification, between care and harm, animates much of this thesis.

Physicality and Pain

Although Scheper Hughes and Bourgois suggest that 'the social and cultural aspects...gives violence its power and meaning' (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004:1) rather than the physicality or embodied experience of violence being self-evidently meaningful, this proposition can be viewed critically in light of phenomenological approaches to anthropology. Building on the phenomenological work of Merleau Ponty (2013), anthropologists studying the relationship between meaning and experience have argued that 'meaning should not be reduced to a sign which, as it were, lies on a separate plane outside the immediate domain of an act' (Jackson 1989: 122). Cultural categories are constituted by and lived *through* the soma (Csordas 1993, 1990; Jackson 1989), rather than meaning and cognition being separable from lived experience. As such, the embodied experience and physicality of violence cannot be dismissed as subordinate to discursive meaning, or separated from the cultural logics which inform it. In this vein Achille Mbembe argues for an attention to the 'phenomenology of violence' (Mbembe 2001:173) and suggests that symbolic meaning cannot be separated from somatic experience, or that 'acts, flesh and rituals...become shot through with signification and symbolism itself not limited to speech and writing' (Varadharajan 2008:126). Similarly, Taylor links Rwandan cultural logics

of body and nation with the specific acts of violence perpetrated during the 1994 genocide (Taylor 1999) and shows that somatic form of violence is constitutive of, rather than subordinate to, meaning. I build on this embodied approach by foregrounding physicality and embodied experience in understanding how subjects emerge through the sport. In particular, I analyse the different ways that pain and suffering are experienced and expressed by the boxing family, who have a nuanced language for expressing both the infliction and experience of pain. This language reflects a complex conceptual engagement with pain as both a form of relationship and as way of objectifying others.

Pain shadows anthropological discussions of violence, often as the embodied, affective experience of objectification. However whereas violence is often understood to create pain and suffering, not all pain is necessarily violent in nature, for example the medicalised pain of healing (Livingston 2012; Hsu 2005).⁵ Elaine Scarry's canonical account of pain suggests that to be in pain is to know one's suffering without doubt, but to witness pain is to have doubt over authenticity of the other's experience (Scarry 1985: 13). By locating pain in the individual body in this way, Scarry suggest that pain ultimately challenges the sociality of being and as such inflicting pain is a process of denying humanity and 'unmaking the world' (Scarry 1985). Yet to render pain as ultimately located in the individually bounded body is to deny that suffering is both socially contingent and mediated (Kleinman et. al 1998, Das et. al 2000).

Having spent many hours in boxing gyms and at fight nights, I find myself in sympathy with Julie Livingston's account of the immediacy of others' pain on an oncology ward in Botswana. Livingstone describes how pain is visible, audible and present on the ward rather than in any doubt (2012: 121). Similarly, in the gym, on the road, as boxers starve and dramatically dehydrate themselves to "make weight" before a fight and in rings across Ghana and the world, the somatic pain of boxing is in no doubt. Rather, pain is talked-about, recognised and transacted-in, and nuanced logics of the experience and ethical infliction of pain are central to the sociality of the boxing family. However, this sociality is acquired through practice rather than being self-evident.

⁵ However, others have argued that scientific medical discourse masks a 'violence of zeal' inherent to Western medicine, which objectifies patients' bodies in order to exercise power over them (Lock 2000).

Asad (2000) and Good (1992) suggests that pain is often necessarily public and involves a recognised 'rhetoric', and similarly Das argues that statements and expressions of pain demand response and acknowledgement (1998, 2007). Pain only isolates and objectifies when its public rhetoric fails to be recognised (Asad 2000: 42), and when suffering is acknowledged the bearer's subjectivity is affirmed (Das 1998, 2007). Enduring and witnessing pain are fundamentally social acts, and become agentive as they are witnessed and attested. Similarly, Jason Throop describes the Yapeese differentiation between mere suffering and the ethical inflection of suffering "for" an other (2010), which affirms both self and other and brings subjects into being in relation to one another through suffering rather than in spite of it (2010: 176).

Commenting on Das' (1998) formulation of pain as demanding response and recognition, Cavell explicitly links violence and pain by arguing that;

not to respond to such a claim [to be in pain] is to deny its existence, and hence is an act of violence...the lack of response is a silence which perpetuates the violence of pain itself. (1998: 94)

To deny pain is to objectify the other, and thus an act of violence. This formulation allows space for non-violent inflictions and experiences of suffering, and is particularly helpful in understanding the Ga concepts of *sha* - potentially productive pain, and *pila* - its destructive and objectifying counterpart. Effectively recognising others' pain, and distinguishing between generative and objectifying suffering is an acquired skill for boxers and coaches, and a skill which shapes the quotidian transactions in physical violence which form the fabric of every-day life in the sport.

In a nod to the lasting relevance of Scarry's work, Livingston notes that although pain on the oncology ward 'threatens to isolate an individual in his or her body ideally (if not always in practice) every effort is made to socialise it' (2012: 149). Just as patients' suffering constantly threatens to objectify patients on the ward, the violence and pain of training and competing also threaten to objectify, isolate and dehumanise boxers. Much of this thesis explores how the boxing family come to socialise suffering and affirm subjects in the face of violence and pain. As a result of their ambivalence, violent inflictions of pain and suffering in the gym and the ring become a site for articulating and understanding the good and the bad, for living life ethically.

Boxing as a past-time and a vocation in Accra is shot-through with nuanced processes of reckoning ethical action and ethical life. To understand how ethical life is lived through the mundane and pervasive attrition of training and competition I turn to the concept of 'ordinary ethics' (Das 2000, 2007, 2015, Lambek 2015). Ordinary ethics sees 'the ethical as a dimension of everyday life in which we are not aspiring to escape the ordinary [through enactments of ideal or exceptional virtue] but rather to descend into it as a way of becoming moral subjects (Das 2012: 134). Ethical life is not achieved by following abstract rules, striving toward exceptional virtue or through 'heroic struggles of good versus evil' (Das 2012: 134). Rather, ethical life is engrained in the banal routines and practices of everyday life (Das 2007, 2012, 2015). Throughout the thesis I trace how ethical life, evaluations of the good and the bad and of good life as a boxer, are engrained into the practices of training and competing, routines outside the gym and the processes of making, and taking, matches in Ghana and abroad.

Much of Das' ethnography on ordinary ethics considers the work of returning to normality and living with the pain and rupture inflicted during violence of the Indian partition riots (Das 1996, 2007). The ordinary is lived not by forgetting pain and rupture but by recognising and witnessing it in everyday life. Das finds ethical life in 'what it takes to allow life to be renewed, to achieve the everyday, under conditions of...catastrophic violence that erode the very possibility of the ordinary.' (2012: 134). Similarly, Al-Mohammad examines how ethical life emerges between subjects in the aftermath, and in spite of the violence and suffering of post-invasion Iraq (2010, 2012a, 2012b). Both Das and Al-Mohammad juxtapose experiences of violence against a return to normality. By contrast, I consider how the violence and attrition of the sport constitute the ordinary for my interlocutors. Ethical life for the boxing family is not a process of achieving normality and the ordinary in the wake of violence but, rather, the violence, pain and attrition of the sport are integral conditions of normality. They form the 'threads that are woven through everyday life' through which the ordinary is lived in the gym and the ring (Das 2012: 134). To live through this ordinary violence, my interlocutors turn to idioms and practices of care and help.

Care and Mutuality

As outlined earlier, relationships of mutual dependence are a pervasive feature of the boxing family. Training and competing demand recognition of individuals' dependence on others to

learn, develop, succeed, win (or lose) and more fundamentally to exist as a boxer or coach. As such, boxers and coaches continually reckon an understanding of the self in relation to others and have a nuanced language and conceptual repertoire for understanding their relationality. Sparring partners, competitors, journeymen, champions, prospects, contenders, head coaches, and seconds (to mention only a few) all describe subjects in the particularity of their relations to others. These different relational subjectivities require different forms of ethical behaviour, and in maintaining these relationships the boxing community often describe their work through idioms of care, caregiving, looking after and help. There is no direct translation for the English word care in Ga, the principle language of the boxing family, although the English term and other phrases which connote care such as “look after” were often used to describe work in the gym and the ring. Idioms of care in the Ga language imply attention towards the other: the verb *kwemo* literally translates as to ‘look at/for’ someone and describes physical acts of care or looking after, whereas *Edween ehe* describes care as an emotional investment in or affection for another. While these constructions are not literal explanations of care as a concept, they point to understandings of care as a relationship which requires an orientation towards others. To help understand care in the boxing context, I turn to anthropological discussions of what care is, and what care does.

Care, like boxing, is ‘infused with experience and expertise [which] depend on subtle skills’ (Mol, Moser & Pols 2010: 14). Rather than being defined only by intention or sentiment, caregiving demands practice and skill in ‘particular forms of activity, at once social, representational, and very concretely material.’ (Taylor 2008: 326). Attention to the embodied skill and the physicality of competing and training (Wacquant 2004, Woodward 2008, 2007) is also an attention to how care is learned as a practical set of skills. An attention to practices and skills of care reflect my conceptual understanding of ethics as engrained in mundane practices ‘like threads woven into the weave of life’ (Das 2012: 134), and dovetails with my suggestion that the physicality of violence and pain are socially meaningful rather than subordinate to discursive meaning (Mbembe 2000, Jackson 1989, Csordas 1994, 1996). Where Janelle Taylor’s account of care practices between herself and her mother, who suffers from Alzheimer’s, allow an understanding of ‘expressions of care couched in the idiom of dementia’ (2008: 329), this thesis builds an understanding of care as couched in the physicality and embodied idioms of boxing in Accra.

Following Pettersen (2008) and Mol et. al (2010), I take care to be reciprocal rather than delivered from a care-giver to a receiver. 'Mature care' (Pettersen 2008) moves beyond understandings of care as altruistic and unidirectional, and instead foregrounds reciprocity and mutuality by showing how care affirms the subjectivity of both the care-giver and the cared for simultaneously. Understanding invocations of care in the gym and the ring as 'mature care' helps to account for the reciprocity that boxers perceive in their work. For example, a defeated boxer might describe themselves as having "helped" their opponent, while simultaneously the victor might explain that they "looked after" or "took care of" their opponent. Mature care as non-altruistic and reciprocal addresses the way that boxers gain in a multitude of different ways from their victories (and often, too, from losses), yet in gaining personally they also recognise and maintain the relationships of dependence within which they are enmeshed.

Practices of care also highlight the ethical as they 'evoke the goods and the bads at stake' (Mol, Mosner and Pols 2010: 11). The boxing family's repertoire of contextually appropriate practices of care address the ambivalence of violence in the sport; at once potentially productive and emically understood as good, yet also possibly objectify and understood as detrimental and bad. As a physical practice, care-work in the gym and the ring is often potentially dangerous and harmful (Henderson 2011, Carsten 2013; Mol, Mosner & Pols' 2010:13) as well as being affirmative and beneficial.

For Thelen (2015: 509), practices of care constitute the labour of making and maintaining relational subjectivities. Thelen's work highlights the creative nature of care, rather than care being understood as an obligation of a pre-existing relationship (Faubion 2001). Similarly, authors studying the AIDS/HIV epidemic of the late 1990s and early 2000s have argued that practices of care 'actively augment sociality compromised through HIV/AIDS' (Henderson 2012:9, 2011, Klaitz 2010, Dilger 2010, Reece 2016). Relational constructs such as kinship (Klaitz 2010, 2009) and personhood (Henderson 2011, 2012) are re-made through acts and process of care in the face of a disease which erodes their coherence. Despite the boxing industry (and global sporting industries more broadly) venerating hyper-individualism (Besnier 2012, Besnier & Brownell 2015), the importance of care among the boxing family points to boxers' understandings of themselves as fundamentally relational subjects. I borrow Sahlins' term 'the mutuality of being' (2013) to describe the way that boxers' lives are enmeshed to the extent that they become 'members of one another, who participate

intrinsically in each other's identity and existence.' (2013: 62). Although Sahlins' develops the 'mutuality of being' as the distinguishing feature of kinship relations (2013), I show how the term helps to understand boxers experience of non-kinship relationality. Throughout this thesis I consider how acts and processes of care create and maintain boxers as mutual and relational subjects.

Care is of course not politically neutral, but 'can be permeated with unequal relations of power and forms of condescension' (Hendersen 2011:23). Philosophical approaches to care have been criticised for producing a concept so deeply defined by mutuality that it ignores the exercise of power and hierarchy through practices of care (Carsten 2013: 246; Lambek 2011; Peletz 2000). The boxing community is cross-cut with intersecting relationships of power and dependence, many of which are asymmetric and hierarchical. Both giving and receiving care articulate hierarchies and asymmetries of power, and 'mature care' recognises that such unequal relations can be coercive and controlling (Pettersen 2008; Thelen 2007), yet still affirms subjects in relation to one another.

Care practices in times of social rupture call for a re-imagining of what care is and can be (Henderson 2012: 11). When the boxing family conceptualise violent and painful interactions which have the capacity to harm as well as nurture through idioms of care, they also re-imagine what care is and can be. In chapters one, two and three I examine the ways that practices of care respond to the pervasive violence of the sport, and at times are both painful and violent interactions themselves.

Relatedness and Relationality

Although the boxing community often refer to themselves as the boxing family, boxers do not consider themselves as siblings nor their coaches as parents. The family is more akin to a metaphor than a statement of relatedness, and is usefully understood through the anthropological move away from the idea of kinship as ultimately reflecting genealogical descent. Noting the implicit distinction between the 'social' and the 'biological' inherent to the western concept of kinship, Carsten proposes 'relatedness' as a way of conceptualising 'indigenous idioms of being related' (2000: 4) which are not necessarily representative of genealogical descent. The New Kinship Studies movement's emphasis of the importance of

relatedness allowed analyses to 'side-step the biological/social dichotomy...that "kinship" carries' (Carsten 2013, cf. Strathern 1992, Carsten 2000, 1995, 1997) and reflect critically on Euro-American assumptions of what family is and how it shapes society. Kinship terms are instead conceptualised as 'inherently linking terms...[which] render the self in and through its relation to others' (Faubion 2003:3). Carsten notes that the relative fluidity of 'relatedness' as a concept makes it difficult to distinguish analytically from other forms of social relation or relational being (2000: 5). However, much recent scholarship implies that remains a substantial difference between kinship relations (however fluid) and other forms of sociality. This difference is neither guaranteed by birth nor constant over time, and the slippages between conceptually "social" and "biological" ties – where friends might refer to one another as brothers or by contrast mothers and daughters might be "best friends" (Carsten 2013: 249, Edwards and Strathern 2000) - highlight the temporal fluidity of relatedness.

Despite this understanding of relatedness as fluid and constructed, kinship idioms are also used widely as terms of address which do not necessarily imply relatedness (van der Geest 2013; Pitt-Rivers 1973). A term of address reflects the observation that 'the social meaning of a word when used as an address does not necessarily have a close connection to that word's literal meaning' (Dickey 1997: 255; Braun 1988). By contrast a term of reference denotes a more literal meaning, for instance when a kinship term is used to articulate relatedness (Dickey 1997: 256). To assume that all uses of kinship terms or idioms necessarily reflect understandings of relatedness would be a mistake. When pressed on why he and others insisted that I refer to the boxing community as the boxing family, Washington explained that:

It is because we are all together. We are working together, looking after each other in that way like a family.

Here 'family' is a simile which shows likeness between the sociality of the boxing community and the sociality of family, rather than being an expression of relatedness. 'Family' is the only kinship term commonly used in the boxing community and kinship classification are not used in more specific referential ways - coaches are not "fathers" or "mothers" and boxers are not "sons" or "daughters" etc. The boxing community do not understand relatedness as kin to

emerge through work in the gym and the ring. Rather, relations in the boxing community are sharply distinguished from kinship relations when the two intersect.

To address why kinship idioms are appropriate despite not being used to establish relatedness, I analyse the similarities between understandings of relationality among the boxing community and relatedness in Ga Mashie. Here the concept of metaphor becomes useful; as a metaphor the term 'family' both draws equivalence *and* suggests difference between the relatedness of being family and the relationality of being a boxer. The 'family' metaphor addresses the way that the boxing community 'qualify the self as a subject through its relation to others. Correlatively, they qualify others to identify the self through their relation to it' (Faubion 2001:11) as I show in chapters one and two. Unpicking relatedness and relationality is a central concern when (as is fairly common) siblings emerge as potential competitors. Chapter three follows the process of managing siblingship between boxers, and in doing so accounts for the simultaneous likeness and difference between being a boxer and being family. Both the 'family' metaphor and the family's concern with care point to a central assertion of this thesis; to become a boxer is to become defined through relationships of mutuality and dependence.

The City and The World

The boxing family's striking global mobility and engagement with a global industry create a significantly different sense of being in a purportedly "globalized" world to accounts which emphasise African youths' experiences of exclusion and immobility in the face of purportedly ubiquitous connection and opportunity (Weiss 2008, 2009, Weaver Shipley 2008). Part two of this thesis considers how movement at different scales reflect the relations of power which shape the lives of the boxing family in a global industry. I examine three substantially different forms of movement - international global mobility, pedestrian movement around Ga Mashie and the ritualised public procession performed at funerals and boxing matches called *Jama*. Drawing these three forms of movements together, I show how they reflect an understanding of macro-imaginaries including the state, the nation and the global boxing industry. Here I build on scholarship which theorises the embodied movement as implicated in global relations of power (Sheller & Urry 2006, Pink 2012, Ingold & Vergunst 2008, Hinkson

2017). As they move across the city and the world, the boxing family articulate agency in the face of power dynamics which often subordinate and marginalise them.

While processes of globalization have created an increasingly interconnected world of concepts, markets and people (Tsing 2005, 2015; Weiss 2008), this paradoxically leads to the increasing importance of the local and geographically specific (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005, Geschiere 2009). Rather than being a defined locality or space, the local is a concept of belonging which emerges in opposition interactions and processes of global reach and significance. What constitutes the local, and who can legitimately articulate their belonging at a conceptually local scale, is politically charged and hotly contested in sub-Saharan Africa, as others have discussed at length (Lentz 2013, Nugent and Lentz 2000, Mujere 2010). A sense of belonging in Ga Mashie and central Accra pervades the boxing family and the history of boxing in Accra (Akyeampong 2002 and Dunzendorfer 2011, 2014). This, coupled with the boxing family's striking global engagement and aspirations to success on the world stage, leads to understandings of the city and the world – the particularity of belonging in Ga Mashie on the one hand, and a sense of involvement in global flows, exchanges and competitions on the other – as important concepts in boxers lives. The boxing family actively construct a sense of belonging in the ethno-spatial enclave of Ga Mashie and simultaneously articulate a sense of global connection and relevance as they traverse the city and the globe.

While pervasive global flows have led to increased opportunities, mobility and access to goods and services for some, for many this proliferation of connection has led to novel forms of exclusion, marginality and disconnection (Besnier & Brownell 2012; Salazar & Smart 2011; Tsing 2005, 2015; Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000). This sense of exclusion often takes the form of a paradoxical experience connection and disconnection with seemingly unlimited but unrealisable opportunities, 'where desire and longing remain unfulfilled, where dream and delusion, or erection and impotence, go hand in hand' in African urban spaces (De Boeck 2004: 250; cf. Weiss 2008). Embodied fantasies of global engagement and connection in the face of marginality have been argued to characterise youth experiences of such (dis)connection in African urban spaces (Mains 2007, Burrell 2012, Weiss 2008, 2009).

Filip de Boeck (2004) uses the metaphor of smashing a mirror to capture the complexity, fluidity and creativity of life in Kinshasa, under similar conditions of seemingly ubiquitous opportunity and limited possibility. He argues that 'paradigms of resistance against the

hegemonies of state, money and market fail to fully capture the complexities of the realities lived by many in Congo today' (2004: 19). The metaphor of constantly smashing, piecing together and re-smashing a mirror (2004: 19) articulates the derivative, yet creative and agentive process of Kinois' sense of self and the city of Kinshasa. To smash the mirror is to reject static external depictions of the city. Kinois exercise some agency in piecing the mirror back together again as they re-imagine their self-image and their city, without losing sight of the continued influence of pervasive global power dynamics and external perceptions on life in Kinshasa. Life for his Kinois interlocutors is critical, reflexive and agentive, but none-the-less subject to power relations which subordinate Kinois and create 'an urban reality stained by a film of increasing poverty...physical and symbolic violence...and a pervasive sense of societal crisis and loss.' (2004: 18).

De Boeck's mirror metaphor works well for understanding the experience of the boxing family. Like de Boeck's Kinois interlocutors, the boxing family understand themselves as subject to subordinating relations of power which reflect macro-imaginaries of vast scales including the state, the nation and imagined Western centres of the global boxing industry such as Western Europe and the USA. These power relations are experienced in the form of ethnic stereotypes of Gas as rowdy, violent and quick-tempered, stereotypes of racialized and gendered bodies (see chapter four) and complex financial inequalities which pervade the international boxing industry (see chapters four and five). Boxers and coaches continually re-shape and re-make their subject position in light of, and through, external perceptions of the sport, the city, Ga ethnicity and racialized masculinity. Smashing mirrors and piecing them back together captures the importance of external perceptions and power dynamics in the boxing family's lives, but leaves space for creativity and agency in their work.

Power and Movement

Embodied forms of movement have been argued to author and create a sense of place (Ingold & Vergunst 2008; Pink 2012; Massey 1994; de Certeau 1984; Hinkson 2017), rather than being ways of travelling through places which exist prior to or outside of their occupation. Place refers to a constellation of meanings formed as paths are traced through space; ordering, connecting and constructing a sense of whole in the process (de Certeau 1984, Ingold 2010). Place also emerges through the everyday interactions and dramas that

occur as people circulate through and around space (Pink 2008, Hinkson 2017). Given the politicisation of place and belonging in a globally connected world (Geschiere 2003, Lentz 2013, Nugent and Lentz 2000, Mujere 2010), movement as the annunciation of place becomes inherently political (Hinkson 2017). The political potential of movement becomes clear when the boxing family re-imagine their position in relation to the nation, the state and centres of the global boxing industry by moving into, out of, through and around the city.

De Boeck turns to the Foucauldian concept of heterotopias; 'places where it is possible to think or to enact all the contradictory categories of a society simultaneously' (2004: 254), to address the complex, shifting and contradictory experience of living in a contemporary Kinshasa. As a heterotopia, life in the city offers only 'glimpses of the possibility of overcoming fragmentedness...and [rupture]' (2004: 257), rather than the possibility of total or complete agency. Ultimately for de Boeck 'the city is a word' as the potential of language to express different (and contradictory) meanings and realities best reflects the shifting and fluid nature of life in Kinshasa; 'words provide city dwellers with a potent tool to create other, alternative orders' (2004: 259). If movement, like language, is annunciate and creative (Ingold 2010; Ingold & Vergunst 2008; Pink 2012; Massey 1994; de Certeau 1984; Hinkson 2017), moving through, around, into and out of the city are ways of creating and sharing alternative orders of the world, the nation, the state and the city for the boxing family.

In chapter five, pedestrian movement articulates an alternative order where Ga Mashie is not a migratory starting point or source of cheap labour in an international industry, but an engaged and relevant node which is occupied by globally exceptional athletes. In chapter six, the relationship between the state, the nation, the boxing family and the ethnic Ga enclave of Ga Mashie are re-imagined through the funerary process, and in particular the sense of belonging articulated by movement on foot through the city during the ritual funerary procession of *Jama*. Rather than attempting to give a (necessarily) incomplete image of the boxing family and its relationship with Ga Mashie and the city of Accra, chapters four to six consider three ways in which gendered experience, a sense of connection in a global industry and a sense of belonging in central Accra are articulated in relation to macro-imaginaries of power. Or, in de Boeck's terms, three ways in which the mirror is broken and pieced together again.

Methodology

I trained between three and five times a week at the Attoh Quarshie for the duration of my fieldwork and, depending on the schedule of upcoming fights, joined others in road-work and carefully controlling my diet and sleep as others did prior to a bout. Here, my research follows an established tradition of foregrounding bodily praxis and embodied experience in ethnographic research (Jackson 1989, Bourdieu 1977, Stoller 1987, Wacquant 2004). Given the sport's emphasis on embodied knowledge and skill (Wacquant 2004, 2011, Hopkinson 2015) 'it would be a mistake to see the [boxer's] body as simply a representation of a prior idea or implicit cultural pattern. Persons actively body-forth the world; their bodies are not passively shaped by or made to fit the world's purpose' (Jackson 1989: 136). Meaning is made by the boxing family as they move, sense and interact physically with one another and the city. My emphasis on the importance of training reflects this embodied understanding of meaning and follows methodological approaches which stress that 'learning and knowing [is] situated in embodied practice and movement' (Pink & Howes 2010:332, cf. Wacquant 2011). Training at the gym provided the ground from which to build a (necessarily embodied) understanding of the values and practices which shape the boxing family's sociality. Although I had boxed prior to beginning this fieldwork, I was a relative novice in the Attoh Quarshie. I took on a novice role among the gym community, had an initiation fight myself (like the one described at the beginning of the introduction) and trained with other amateur boxers and novices. The novice position is useful in that relatively little knowledge is assumed and questions are expected. My work here follows an established tradition of taking on an apprenticeship positions in the field (Stoller 1987, 1989; Landry 2008, Wacquant 2004).

The gym was an anchorage for my ethnography in the sense that I came to know, and became known to, the boxing family through my affiliation to the Attoh Quarshie. My involvement in spaces outside the gym such as fight nights or official meetings often came through the Attoh Quarshie – for example when accompanying Washington as a coaching assistant or when watching my gym-mates compete. Even when I was not officially accompanying an Attoh Quarshie member, I was often recognised or received through my affiliation to the Attoh Quarshie.

I often accompanied Washington and Osman on trips to other gyms and to meetings with coaches, boxers, promoters, managers and officials in the city. I was also able to spend time

observing training at a number of other gyms as I came to know other coaches better, although I did not train at other gyms. Given Washington's position as assistant coach to the Black Bombers, I spent a considerable amount of time working with the national team in training and occasionally trained with them, although I found the rigours of training twice a day often difficult to manage alongside effective research. When I trained, I wrote field notes that evening or the following morning. When I did not train, I often observed at the Attoh Quarshie and other gyms, taking notes by hand during sessions, occasionally conducting short recorded interviews and writing up longer reflections in the evening or the following morning. Observation at training is equally a form of participation as training session across town are almost always attended by on-lookers.

Rather than beginning my research through a gate-keeper and slowly expanding my connections and research-autonomy in the field outwards, the longer I spent at the Attoh Quarshie the more I appreciated the importance of gym affiliation and felt it was appropriate to run my research activities through the Attoh Quarshie coaches and boxers. As my knowledge of the field increased, so did my stability within it – as a member of the Attoh Quarshie – and the hierarchies and social expectations of that membership came to shape my access and research to a greater degree. While my access in the field was certainly much greater towards the end of my time in Accra than when I began fieldwork, my research became much more collaborative as the Attoh Quarshie membership suggested suitable research activities or warned me against those which they considered less appropriate. My ethical obligations not only reflected my training as an anthropologist and institutional affiliation, but my training and affiliation as a boxer in Accra.

On Embodied Ethnography

Despite my emphasis on ethnography as an embodied practice, it is important to recognise that the ethnographer's embodied experience may not necessarily reflect their interlocutors'. In his extensive ethnographic work on boxing in south Chicago, Loic Wacquant displays striking epistemological naivety when he conflates his experience of training as a boxer with his interlocutors' experience – young, disenfranchised men 'in the ghetto' (2011: 85, cf. 2004). He claims to '[offer] a "slice" of this universe from inside' (2011:85) and goes on to describe how he 'melted into the local landscape' (2011:87) as he trained alongside his interlocutors for three years, and reflecting on this methodology encourages future

researchers to follow his lead and 'Go ahead, go native' (2011:88). To conflate my experience with my interlocutors' in this way would be to ignore the established critique that, despite participating in the routines and activities of our interlocutors' daily lives, ethnographers do not come to inhabit their interlocutors' subject positions or share directly their experiences (Landry 2008, Woodward 2008). The myriad differences in life-history and positionality between myself – a white male from the UK in his mid-twenties with the security of institutional support - and my gym-mates – mostly West-African men under thirty, often migrants to the city with little financial and social security – have a profound effect on our experience. Reflecting on ethnography as an embodied research methodology in light of this critique, Timothy Landry suggests that despite his practice of Haitian Vodou, 'I never felt like I was "becoming" Haitian, nor did I assume my experiences as an initiate in Vodou were the same as those experienced by my Haitian informants' (Landry 2008: 62). Similarly, Kath Woodward cautions the ethnographer against 'making universal, "insider" claims' (2008: 555) which do not recognise the differences between researchers and their subjects' experience. These cautions and critiques do not devalue embodied approaches to ethnography but demand a critical attention to what knowledge is being produced.

In a similar vein to Wacquant, Ingold suggests that the embodiment of 'ways of perception' and similar 'practical activity' results in a shared experience and perception (2011: 14). However, to equate sense with experience is to belie the fact that sense itself is culturally mediated (Pink & Howes 2010). It would be naïve at best to suggest that I came to experience the subject position of my interlocutors by training in the gym. This is patently not the case. Rather, the insights afforded by training helped me to become conversant in the 'cultural idioms' (Wacquant 1995: 493) of boxing: the ways in which embodied experience is talked about, understood and valued. This familiarity helped me to make sense of my broader observations and experiences in the field by narrowing (if not eclipsing) the epistemic distance between myself and my interlocutors. What follows is an account which reflects my experience of engaging with a dynamic and shifting community. I endeavor to give my interlocutors' voices prominence in reflecting on meaning engendered through embodied practices, in recognition of the epistemological gap between my experience and theirs. As a result, language became a key methodological aspect of my work.

Language

During the majority of my fieldwork I lived in a compound house in Korle Gonno (the next suburb west of Ga Mashie) where Ga was the principle language of communication and where I learned to speak Ga, rather than write or read. This mirrors the practical use of Ga in Accra; although it is a written language, many Ga speakers have limited literacy in Ga and often documents are written in English (the official language of Ghana) unless specifically requested in Ga. Ga is a minority language in the city and generally only the principle language of communication in the Ga enclaves of the city – the coastal towns running from Chorkor in the west to Teshie in the east. Although each of these enclaves is now integrated into the metropolitan sprawl of the city, many maintain the linguistic separation of primarily speaking Ga. Ga Mashie is no exception, and many of my interlocutors described Ga Mashie as ‘where the real Gas are’ or ‘where they speak heavy Ga’, referring to the ubiquity, speed and propensity for dialect use in Ga Mashie.

Likewise, boxing in Ghana is conducted principally in Ga and secondarily in English, rather than *Twi* (the lingua franca of southern Ghana). Boxers who do not speak Ga when they join the Attoh Quarshie are encouraged to learn and taught in the gym. Puns and word-games are a steady source of amusement, and those with a limited proficiency in Ga are often the butt of jokes. Of the many migrants at the Attoh Quarshie who had not learned Ga as children, most now speak Ga to a good standard. Training, meetings and public events such as fight nights and weigh-ins are principally conducted in Ga and secondarily in English. Coaches very rarely use more widely-spoken languages such as *Twi*, *Fante*, *Hausa* or *Ewe* in the gym or among the boxing family, despite much of the gym community being fluent in one or several of these languages. The Ga language maintains and articulates a sense of belonging between the sport, its practitioners and Ga Mashie which I explore further in chapter six.

As well as articulating belonging, Ga can function as a language of concealment, secrecy and collusion (Dakubu 1997). It is rich with proverbs which relate this function, perhaps the most well-known being ‘*E korle yaaa nshona*’ – *Their Korle does not reach the sea*. *Korle* is the name of the lagoon between Ga Mashie and Korle Gonno and the lagoon is important to the Ga state-founding myth and traditionalist cosmology. The proverb is interpreted as a statement that the third party to a conversation does not understand the Ga language: their

Korle does not meet the sea. It serves as a chide, a joke at the expense of the listener, a message of concealment – that it is safe to speak in Ga without the other’s knowledge – and in its opposite form (when the listeners *Korle* does reach the sea) as a warning that communication in Ga around a third party is not safe, or recognition of another’s linguistic competency.

Although proverbs like this were used sparingly, the idea of Ga as a language of concealment and separation was prevalent. Given its limited application beyond the Ga enclaves of Accra and the boxing family few foreigners learn Ga, instead often learning the more ubiquitous *Twi* or *Fante*. My interlocutors encouraged me to deliberately hide my Ga language skills when meeting new people in order to listen to them talking about me without their knowledge. I was instructed to then interject in Ga as a way of announcing my familiarity with the language, and revealing my knowledge of their ‘hidden’ conversations.

This is, of course, not a viable research strategy; not least because I was easily identifiable as the ‘white English boxer who speaks Ga and lives in Korle Gonno’, nor would it have been ethically viable. However, my interlocutors’ insistence on, and enjoyment of, the idea points to the importance of Ga as a tool of concealment and community – as a way of differentiating “us” from “them”. The prevalence of Ga among the boxing family marks the sport’s ongoing ethnic inflection, and its use in preference to *Twi*, English or other more ubiquitous and accessible languages hints at the complex politics of belonging between the boxing family and Ga Mashie.

Narrative and Power

I am one of a steady stream of writers, documentary filmmakers and journalists who have visited Accra hoping to document the sport, and one of a many to visit and train at the Attoh Quarshie. I was certainly not the first white European to train there, nor the first student (Ghanaian or foreign). Given the global profile of several Ghanaian boxers, visits from researchers, writers and film makers are common. The boxing family are also well aware of the unique context of the sport in Accra; as small, relatively globally successful community uniquely associated with an ethnic group and location, and the (often commercial) appeal of this context. Vice, the BBC and a number of other news/documentary outlets have produced

films on the sport in Accra (BBC 2016; Vice 2016, 2017).⁶ As a result the boxing family, and the Attoh Quarshie as one of the more accessible and larger gyms in Ga Mashie, are well-used to dealing with inquisitive foreigners. Given their relatively high public profile in Ghana and abroad, many of my interlocutors are very comfortable with others taking an interest in their business and are often savvy media operators.

Boxers, coaches, managers and promoters often have a well-prepared repertoire of answers for interview questions about their work and upcoming fights. Much of the boxing industry is about selling a story; creating an appealing narrative within which to contextualise a fight and encourage ticket sales. As such, the boxing family have a keen understanding of the value of information they might give out. For example, I saw a former world champion demanded a visiting photographer delete photographs of him training on the grounds that he had not given permission for commercial photography. In another instance, a close friend once suggested that the story of his life would be useful for my research, but that he would not tell me it in full because one day he hoped to sell it himself as a biography. The boxing family are skilled at reflexively constructing narratives which account for, and are often tailored towards, the desires and preferences of the audience. I often witnessed and was part of this process, for example playing the role of a British journalist-come-interviewer in various video clips boxers' made and shared online with the hope of recruiting more fans and increasing their public profile. Of course, researchers are not immune to this reflexivity and performance. I have no doubt that interviews and comments shared with me were made with my positionality and interests in mind, and as such the power dynamics of the ethnographer as author were subtly disrupted throughout my fieldwork. Working with such a reflexive community required an attention not only to the content of the data collected, but to the context within which information was shared, and why it was being presented as it was.

Amateur and Professional boxing

The distinction between amateur and professional boxing structures much of what happens in the sport. The two disciplines are mutually exclusive at competition level – once a

⁶ These films often have a problematically infantilising tone. However, this tone is not discouraged or challenged by the boxing family as they coordinate the narratives made available to film-makers and shape film crews' access. This deliberate production and manipulation of alternative narratives would merit further research.

professional licence has been granted, a boxer can no longer box against amateur boxers and after three professional fights can never be licenced as an amateur again. Professional boxers are paid per-fight, whereas amateurs are not paid to box. Ghanaian amateur boxers who are selected for the national team (the “Black Bombers”) are often retained as employees of the state – police officers, military personnel or prison officers. These roles are largely ceremonial and boxers are generally not expected to undertake full duties. Instead, a salary, accommodation and training facilities are provided to them with the expectation that they will not turn professional. As such, amateur boxing is a source of income for only the few, elite level boxers in the country. The financial rewards of boxing for the national amateur team are modest compared to the highest-paid Ghanaian professionals, but the job security and regular income of national amateur boxers is much greater than the vast majority of aspiring professionals who earn relatively little. The state invests in amateur boxing because only amateurs can represent Ghana at international events such as the Olympics.⁷ Amateur boxing is often a route into the sport and the vast majority of professionals will have boxed as amateurs first.

Amateur boxing is fought over three rounds of three minutes for men and three or four rounds of two minutes for women. Amateur boxers wear heavier gloves with more padding, wear singlets and female amateur boxers wear head guards to compete. Professional bouts vary in length between four and twelve three-minute rounds (pre-designated before the fight). Professionals wear lighter gloves with less padding and male professional boxers are shirtless. In most countries the two sports are sanctioned by different professional bodies – in Ghana the Ghana Amateur Boxing Federation (GABF) sanctions amateur boxing and the Ghana Boxing Authority (GBA) sanctions the professional sport. Boxers can only be licenced by one body at a time.

Amateur boxing’s greater emphasis on protective equipment and shorter bouts lead to fast-paced bouts with less emphasis on knockouts. Professional bouts are often fought at a slower

⁷ In 2016 AIBA (the International Boxing Association, or Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur) sought to change this regulation recently, and in 2016 professional boxers were eligible to compete at the Olympic Games. This move was opposed by a number of national professional sanctioning bodies – for example the British Boxing Board of Control. The move was the result of a complex politics of control between the disparate international governing bodies of amateur and professional boxing – a subject which could occupy another thesis. Many high-profile professional boxers were against the changes, as were many amateurs. Few professionals competed in the 2016 Olympics, and Ghana’s single representative who qualified for the games was an amateur boxer.

pace (in part because they are longer), with a higher premium on knockouts. Boxing technique is generally the same between the two disciplines, but the subtle differences demand slightly different strategic and tactical approaches. Professionals often trained for slightly longer than amateurs, reflecting their longer bouts, but boxers in both disciplines did the same range of technical exercises. Notwithstanding these differences in equipment, finances and tactics, the two disciplines remain closely associated. The Ghanaian coaches I know all train both amateurs and professionals.

History and Context

Ga Mashie has a complex history of encounters with colonising and trading parties from across West African and Europe. John Parker argues that Ga Mashie as a permanent settlement cohered during the long period of engagement with foreign powers from 1550 onwards (2000: 9). From 1550 Ga migrants from the hills north of Accra became the dominant political force in the area of contemporary Accra (2000:9). Simultaneously, several trading hubs were established around several European coastal forts in the area that is now Ga Mashie. The first of these was a Portuguese fort (destroyed by the Ga in 1576), followed by the Dutch Ussher Fort in 1649, the Danish Christianborg in 1661 in Osu, two miles to the East, and finally the British James Fort half a mile west of Ussher fort in 1672-73 (Parker 2000: 9-10). These forts served as trading hubs between the inland Ashanti empire, the major political force in the region at the time, and the various European nations. During this period the Ga state was alternately independent, integrated into and at times a client-state-of the Ashanti Empire. Subsequently, Ga Mashie became the capital of the British Gold Coast following the end of the second Anglo-Ashanti war in 1877. Parker argues that it was the establishment of these forts, and the trade that they encouraged between various inland empires and European powers that acted as the 'catalyst for the Urban growth of the three Accra *nshonamajii*, the "seaside towns"', and consequently the importance of Accra in the Gold Coast colony and contemporary Ghana (2000:10). In this sense, a feeling of global connection is not a phenomenon of the twentieth century in Accra. This long period of international trade and engagement remains tangible in the topography of Ga Mashie, most notably in the form of Ussher Fort, Christiansborg and James Fort which still stand today.

Scholarly analyses offer two accounts of boxing's association with Ga people. Akyeampong (2002) suggests that the popularity of boxing is intimately intertwined with Ga values and their historic Ga pugilistic sport *asafo atwele* (2002:59). He argues that boxing in Ghana has taken on a uniquely Ga imprint (2002: 40), facilitating group identity-making and masculinity by continuing social integration through martial practice (2002: 39). He concludes by suggesting that the style of the *asafo atwele* pugilists as lightweight, high energy combatants concerned principally with entertaining their audience is continued today in the values of Ga boxers (2002: 51).

Conversely, Dunzendorfer (2011, 2013) argues that the idea of boxing as a continuation of an historic cultural tradition of pugilism belies the complexity of the sport's history in post-colonial Ghana. He argues that the 'myth of ethicized boxing' was instrumentalised by Ga activists in the face of spatial and social marginalisation during the city's rapid urban expansion in the mid twentieth century (2013: 8). Dunzendorfer criticises Akyeampong's analysis for reducing the 'complex development of boxing in Ghana' to an ethnic stereotype and producing an 'essentializ[ed] history of boxing in Ghana' (2013:2). He suggests instead that boxing in early 20th century Accra was associated with modernity due to its global appeal and colonial influences (2013:2). Given the rapid rate of urban expansion in Accra in the 1950s, and as a result the spatial and political marginalisation of the Ga population already living there (Quarcoopome 1992:49), political activist groups such as the *Ga Shifimo Kpee* (Ga Steadfast Association) formed to promote Ga rights. These groups deployed the trope of ethicized boxing to articulate a virile ethnic (Ga) masculinity in the city and simultaneously to appeal to a pan-African discourse of empowerment (Dunzendorfer 2013, Genarro 2013). Boxing became an important trope of the politicized expression of ethnic identity and 'first of all a political narrative' (Dunzendorfer 2011:2) in the face of political marginalisation and land alienation of Gas in post-independence Accra (Quarcoopome 1992).

Neither Akyeampong's nor Dunzendorfer's analyses fully recognise the implications of the anthropological critique of ethnicity. Akyeampong's argument objectifies Ga society, drawing an 'epistemic boundary' (Bernault 2006: 207) between Ga social values and those of European colonizers and other ethnic groups. While Dunzendorfer's historical account affords Ga people a degree of agency, his analysis ultimately treats the Ga people as a culturally and temporally homogeneous object. Rather than seeking to establish the validity of these arguments, I take a constructivist approach to ethnicity as a fluid and politically

engaged category (Nugent 2008, Geurts 2003, Bernault 2006) in order to address how and why the Ga-ness of boxing remains relevant.

Contemporary ethno-politics in Accra

Despite being proud of representing their nation on a global stage, the boxing family are often highly critical of the Ghanaian state's perceived chronic lack of support for the sport. Coaches and boxers often suggest that the state systematically channels resources toward football, despite the relative global success of Ghana's boxers. Dissatisfaction with the state is part of a broader politics of marginalisation in central Accra, often expressed through the idiom of ethnicity. Although much of the land of Greater Accra is Ga land (*Ga Shikpon*) and the six Ga towns of Tema, Teshie, Nungua, La, Osu and Ga Mashie (each with their own Chief, and together comprising the Ga State) are interwoven into the fabric of the city, Gas are not the majority ethnic group of the city. Tensions exist over the state's compulsory acquisition of 'stool lands' – land under the authority of a chief, with no recognition of Traditional councils' authority (Asante 2011, Yeboah 2008, Tsikata 2004). Ga areas of Accra (Ga Mashie being a notable case) also contain pockets of severe poverty and are poorly-provisioned in terms of state infrastructure investment. As noted above a sense of ethnic marginalisation in the city has historically led to "Ga-rights" political movements and a sense of alienation continues to be a salient feature of contemporary Ga experience (de Witte 2008). Unease over land acquisition, poverty and a lack of state investment crystalized recently when the state sold Ga land previously earmarked for public development to private developers. A dynamic of Ga urban autochthony emerged 'where the backlash against the Kufuour government in the 2004 Ghana elections was linked to Ga grievances about the privatisation of land that had previously been claimed by the state for public good' (Nugent & Locatelli 2009: 6). Members of the boxing family often suggested to me that the state's perceived lack of support for the sport was continuous with the wider marginalisation of Gas in Accra.

More recently, tensions over ethno-political authority have led to the violent contestation of "traditional" practices such as the Ga ban on drumming prior to the annual Ga state-regeneration festival of *Homowo* (De Witte 2012). As a result, the urban sound-scape has become a newly contested space of political authority in which the Ga state claims primacy over the Ghanaian state (De Witte 2012). Whereas Akinyele (2009), and Nugent and Locatelli

(2009) read this politics of belonging through the concept of autochthony, the sense of belonging articulated by the boxing family works through a nexus between practice, place and person rather than a claim to being the 'first-comer'. Boxing in Accra is part of a complex politics of belonging and authority understood variously through sensory experience, demarcations of space and land rights in the city.

Chapter Summaries

Much like this introduction, my ethnography moves outward from the gym. Chapter one considers how relationships are formed and maintained through the violence of training, and how the experience and infliction of pain is understood as both potentially affirming and potentially objectifying. Care emerges as a central concern of both coaches and boxers in the gym as they work to avoid objectifying and harming one another. An ambivalence towards violence, as both potentially affirming and objectifying, shapes the ethics of physicality in the gym. Ethical life as part of the gym community is grounded in the everyday actions and routines of training, and the capacity to care for others through the attrition of the sport.

Chapter two considers how relational subjects emerge during bouts. I analyse how boxing "correctly" during a fight requires recognition of boxers' mutual dependence and implication in one another's lives and futures. To do so, I consider the figure of the journeyman – a boxer who loses regularly – and explore how care in the ring is understood as mutual despite hierarchies of skill between boxers. The boxing family's emphasis on practices of care suggests that ethical life for the boxing family requires an orientation towards others, rather than a focus on self-fashioning.

Chapter three asks how ethical physicality and mutuality among the boxing family intersects with other forms of relationality and relatedness in boxers' lives. In particular, I consider how sibling relations (which are fairly common between boxers) problematize practices of care and affirmation between boxers. I analyse the process of matchmaking to examine how siblingship and boxers' relationality are understood to form subjects in similar ways. I then consider how practices of weight management navigate this problematic intersection between relatedness and the relationality of boxing, and conclude the chapter by reflecting on what differentiates kinship relations from other forms of social connection.

Chapter four builds on the observation that boxers are embedded in social relations beyond the sport. Boxers' aspirations within the sport speak to gendered identities embedded more broadly in the social milieu of central Accra. I analyse widely-held aspirations toward iconic masculinity embodied by Floyd Mayweather, before examining how gendered aspirations are problematized when boxers become globally mobile. Boxers re-cast their aspirations in response to global power dynamics within the sport and in doing so articulate themselves as masculine subjects in novel and creative ways. Gender relations in Accra, and perceptions of self among boxers, thus offer a window onto global power dynamics in an international industry, and the potential for agency in the face of structural violence and pervasive subordination.

Building on the boxing family's engagement with a global industry, chapter five explores how dynamics of centre-and-periphery are experienced and re-thought as boxers move around Ga Mashie on foot. Quotidian forms of pedestrian movement among the symbolically significant topography in Ga Mashie disrupt established dynamics of centre-and-periphery. In particular, I examine the normalised experience of encountering globally engaged boxers as pedestrians in the street beside or amongst iconic images of their global relevance and success. Ga Mashie is experienced as an engaged global node rather than a source of sporting labour or a migratory starting point. Pedestrian movement becomes a way of responding to the macro-imaginary of a globally connected boxing industry.

Chapter six continues this understanding of movement as political in relation to the ethnic inflection of boxing in Accra. I argue that ethnicity is not a suitable frame for the Ga-ness of boxing in Accra. Instead, I propose an embodied sense of belonging between the sport, the boxing family and Ga Mashie. I consider how this sense of belonging is articulated during the funeral of Allowey, the former head coach of the Attoh Quarshie. The funerary practice of *Jama*, a collective procession, during Allowey's funeral highlights how a sense of belonging responds to claims by the state over the deceased, ethnic stereotypes of boxing and the boxing family's nationalist pride. As such, *Jama* engages with the macro-imaginary of the state, ethnicity and the nation.

Questions of care, violence and power in a profoundly unequal sporting industry animate my ethnography and analysis throughout this thesis. I conclude by drawing these themes together in a discussion of what it means to be connected, included and/or excluded.

Part I

1

No pain, No Gain:

The Ethics of Physicality

Painted above the door to the Attoh Quarshie boxing gym is *"House of Pain"*. Inside sunlight filters through the aperture windows on the far wall making the gym dark and close in the afternoon heat. In the centre of the gym is a ring, approximately five meters square and raised two feet from the ground. The ring abuts the far wall and leaves a narrow walkway along the near wall, linking the two empty floor spaces either side of it. Behind the ring on the rear wall are painted a pair of over-sized boxing gloves, their cartoonish curves resemble a pair of big red ears. To the left of the gloves are the words "No Pain", to the right "No Gain". At the end of most training sessions in the Attoh Quarshie, boxers gather together to stretch and pray in a circle. After a collective "Amen", an experienced boxer shouts "No Pain!" to which the others respond "No Gain!", before another call and response of "No Gain" - "Without Pain!". Although this is a common moniker in (boxing) gyms across the world, in the Attoh Quarshie it speaks to a cultivated relationship with pain, violence and physicality in training.

The murals and the chanting hint at the positive inflection of pain in the gym, however boxers and coaches also understand their sport as violent, damaging and dangerous. This chapter explores the ambivalence of pain and violence in the gym and shows how this ambivalence is navigated through an ethic which foregrounds care in training. Boxers' and coaches' foregrounding of care is a response to a physicality which is violent and damaging, yet which is also necessary, affirming and beneficial.

To unpick this ethic of care I discuss the use of three Ga words which relate to pain – *sha*, *pila* and *wo ehe*. *Sha* refers to physical pain with a sense of immediacy, pain which is occurring in the moment or which becomes suddenly apparent. In this sense *sha* is similar to acute pain. *Sha* is often external and visible, and linked to something happening on the surface of the body such as a burn or the sting of alcohol in a wound. *Pila* may act as a verb in the sense of the English ‘hurt’; for example, “*Keo pila le, mini woba fee?*” – “If you hurt him, what will we do?” *Pila* can also be an adjective; “*n Pila*” “I am in pain” or “I am hurt”. *Pila* has a longer-term connotation than *sha* and refers to a wound, injury or pain which will last for some time. Although *pila* may be visible or on the surface of the body (such as a large wound or a broken leg) it is not necessarily so, unlike *sha* which is always external. *Ewo ehe* refers to an internal, lasting pain likened by boxers to an ache, soreness or tension. *Ewo ehe* has similar temporal connotations to *pila* insofar as it may be lasting rather than immediate and passing, but it does not necessarily carry the gravity or connotation of lasting injury of *pila*. *Ewo ehe* is internal, it does not manifest on the surface of the body. *Ewo ehe* in this sense shares some similarities with both *pila* and *sha*, but is also similar to chronic pain without an immediate or explicable cause.



House of Pain – The Attoh Quarshie Boxing Gym

My interlocutors often struggled to translate these words directly into English, instead contextualising statements about pain with examples and lengthy descriptions. In doing so they pointed to Michael Jackson's observation that the meaningful nature of embodied experience often exceeds neat conceptualisation and verbal representation (Jackson 1989). The meanings outlined above refer to common uses of the words and the explanations given by my interlocutors without seeking to be definitive. In what follows, I explore how this subtle language is used to articulate a complex conceptual engagement with the experience and infliction of pain as both affirming and objectifying. The gym community navigate this ambivalence through the mundane practices and routines of training.

Ordinary Violence and Care

Much of the boxing family's time is spent in a gym where coaches and boxers gather daily to train, develop skills and prepare for fights. The gym is the basic unit of group organisation – to be a boxer one must be affiliated to a single gym. As the mundane and every-day space of the boxing family, the gym is a site in which much work is done to define the boxing family as a community of shared practice, and consequently of shared ethical orientation.

In examining how subjects emerge through violence and pain in training, I build on Das and Lambek's 'ordinary ethics', which understands ethics as embedded in quotidian everyday practices and relationships (Das 2007, 2012, 2015, Lambek 2015), rather than as a reflexive concern in moments of moral rupture and normative challenge. Ethical life is not achieved through conscious reflection at major crossroads, but is a process which pervades the banal and routine relationships and interactions of everyday life (Das 2007, 2012, 2015). Morality and 'the good' for the Accra boxing community can thus be understood as grounded in the banal routines and relationships of the gym - the quotidian space (or network of spaces) which form the bedrock of the Accra boxing community. Boxing training foregrounds embodied knowledge (Wacquant 2004), and much of what happens in the gym is orientated towards the physicality and embodied nature of the sport. This chapter therefore examines the ethics of that physicality – how corporeal interactions and embodied experiences are morally encoded and ethically practiced. The practices, routines and relationships of training serve as both an entry into the boxing family for novices and as the basis of the shared ethical

orientation which delineates the boxing family as a moral community. As such, these practices are central sites for the production of the good and the bad, and for articulating ethical life. However, while Das juxtaposes violence against the ordinary in her work, I explore how violence constitutes the ordinary - and therefore the ethical - for the boxing family. I refer to the pervasive violence, pain and danger which boxers and coaches recognise in their sport as the attrition of boxing. To live life through this violence, boxers and coaches understand much of their work in the gym through idioms of care and help (*Ga – wa*).

Bourneman argues that care is the processes through which self and other are realised in relation to one another (2001), rather than care being an obligation of certain relationships between subjects (Thelen 2015). Previous anthropological accounts of care have often focused on kinship networks or instances when care is made explicit and/or medicalised during disease and ill-health (Klaits 2010, Mol et. al 2015, Pettersen 2008, Henderson 2011). In these accounts practices of care respond to circumstances which challenge personhood such as illness, death and the dissolution of social networks and relations (Klaits 2010; Henderson 2011). Practices of care in these ethnographies responds to the breakdown of personhood and subjectivity by re-embedding the person in social relations. In the gym care work similarly address instances of social breakdown and responds to the objectifying violence and danger of the sport.

This chapter responds to the call 'to examine critically...diverse projects of caring and being cared for' (Bourneman 2001: 31) and is positioned against anthropological and sociological accounts of boxing which understand the sport as principally about physical domination of the other (Wacquant 1995, 2004). Tracing practices of care in the physicality of boxing shows that 'care may move in complex ways' and in contexts not conventionally understood as caregiving (Mol 2015: 10). I borrow the concept of 'mature care' to understand the pain and violence of training as affirming rather than objectifying for the gym community (Pettersen 2008). As outlined in the introduction, 'Mature care' foregrounds reciprocity and mutuality and considers how practices of care allow multiple subjects to emerge affirmed. Rather than asking whether boxing is good or looking for 'the positive moment of pugilism' (Wacquant 1995: 490), I show that an ethic of physicality which foregrounds effective care responds to the ambivalence of violence in the boxing family's lives. In doing so, I respond to the call for an ethnographically grounded account of the good (Mol et. al 2015), and problematize Das' juxtaposition between violence and the ordinary (Das 2007, 2012, 2014).

An attention to emic understandings of care in the gym reveals that ethical life for boxers is a project of being *with* others, rather than of reflexive self-fashioning to arbitrary moral standards. Whilst anthropology has long given primacy to the sociality of personhood, Hayder al-Mohammad suggests that anthropological approaches to ethics have remained couched in notions of the individual person. He proposes that an anthropology of ethics should consider the *with* of being as fundamental, rather than the subject existing prior to their sociality (al-Mohammad 2010: 436), as others have noted a Foucauldian ethics-of-self suggests (Lambek 2015). Similarly, Das' ordinary ethics suggests that ethical life is fundamentally social and emerges between subjects, rather than as a practice of the reflexive individual (Das 2015:14). By considering care in the gym as a project of relational being (Mol et. al 2014; Pettersen 2008) I show that the coordinates of ethical life for the boxing family are extrinsic and other-orientated (al-Mohammad 2010).

'Punching is a Sickness'

In a hotel room somewhere outside Accra a Nigerian boxer from the Attoh Quarshie stretches and dances to the sound of "Everybody Like My Thing", a raucous dancehall hit by popular Accra artist Shatta Wale. He wears a pair of shorts sewn with green and white sequins, white boxing gloves and a baggy white t-shirt. As he bounces and preens in front of the room's mirror he asks me, in an echo of the song's lyrics "You like my thing yeah? You like how I'm doing it?" Surprised, I agree that I do indeed "like the way he is doing it" and he goes on to tell me that his fight will be over soon as his opponent is "nobody". I have been told to 'look after' the boxer while Washington works the corner of another Attoh Quarshie boxer in the ring at that moment. In practice this means occasionally adjusting a shoe lace, feeding the boxer water and keeping him company as he waits to be called to the ring.

A moment later the door to the hotel room swings open and in walks Allowey, head coach of the Attoh Quarshie. He sees the boxer dancing and singing and beckons him over with a furrowed brow. Allowey waves at me to turn down the music before taking hold of the boxer's gloved hands, feeling their weight and squeezing them gently. Looking up at the boxer Allowey says;

‘Be serious. These [he raises the gloved hands] are weapons. These can kill! We don’t joke with boxing. Any time you can be hurt out there, you can die. So be serious.’

The boxer responds with a solemn “Yes sir”, his hips now still where before they swayed.

A hint of a smile creeps across Allowey’s face, perhaps satisfied that his charge is now taking the bout more seriously. Allowey wishes the boxer good luck before turning to leave. As the door closes behind him the boxer waves a gloved hand towards the speaker on the dresser; I turn the music back on and he starts to sway and step again.

The boxing family understand the sport as inherently violent and dangerous as this vignette shows. In the gym, the ring and in the nervous moments prior to a fight there is a constant effort to ensure that the violence and potential for harm inherent to boxing remains at the forefront of boxers’ and coaches’ minds. Throughout their training regimes, regimented lifestyles and forays between the ropes both boxers and coaches understand the boxer’s body as a finite resource, one which can be honed through training, but which is simultaneously worn down by the violence of the sport. This ambivalence of simultaneously building and destroying is the central tension of this chapter.

One afternoon when preparing George Ashie for an upcoming fight, I asked Washington how he planned George’s training routine. He explained, with the help of a diagram drawn in my notebook, that the intensity of training should build prior to a fight to increase the boxer’s fitness, but should taper down before the fight itself ‘so you don’t use him up with too much training. He has to be fresh [to fight]’. The diagram he drew showed an x-y graph with time on the y axis and the intensity of training on the x. Washington plotted a line climbing the x axis in a series of peaks of increasing height, culminating in a peak towards the top of the axis, before sinking the line back towards the y axis.

Washington’s understanding mirrors a western sports-science model of cyclical tapering prior to competition (Mujika & Padilla 2003; Mujika 2009), but also reflects a linear understanding of the boxer’s body as a finite resource. From the physicality of pair activities such as sparring to the rigours of push-ups, sprints and sit-ups in the gym, many coaches explained that the “hardness” of training had the potential to harm boxers. Harm came in the form of acute injuries which could affect the boxer’s immediate and long-term capacity to train and compete – for example torn muscles, ruptured tendons and broken hands - but

also in understandings of longer-term fatigue and injury associated with excess training. Sparring and pair activities involving punching a training partner straddle the boundary between harm and benefit most precariously. Washington explained that:

‘In sparring if you are taking too many blows all the time, if you are sparring when you don’t need to, you craze [go crazy]. You see those boxers who have sparred too much like this [he mimes swaying side to side]. Their speech is slow. This can come from sparring, so you need to only spar to prepare for the fight. Boxing is too hard.’

Active and ex-boxers who suffer from long-term (often neurological) health conditions associated with the violence of the sport are well known in Ga Mashie; the boxing family is not naïve about the implications of the sport’s physicality. While training is necessary to hone and prepare the boxer’s body for competition, training also presents the constant risk of career-shaping injuries such as cuts, broken bones or torn muscles, *and* the certainty of long-term neurological damage. This damage is perpetrated by training partners and coaches who, as this chapter demonstrates, fail to care effectively for one another. Throughout this thesis I use the concept of attrition to invoke the boxing family’s paired understanding of the sport’s violence and the finite nature of the boxer’s body. The physicality of the sport is at once necessary and problematic; attritional yet potentially beneficial.

Although this chapter draws on Vena Das’ concept of ordinary ethics to explore how ethical life is embedded in and inseparable from the routines and practices of training, I diverge from Das’ work by refusing to juxtapose violence against the ordinary. For Das, ethical life is practiced as people strive to achieve a sense of ordinary being in the wake of exceptional violence – the violence of the partition of India in the case of much of Das’ ethnography (2007, 2012). The ordinary is lived not by forgetting the pain and rupture of the partition violence, but by working to incorporating that pain and rupture into everyday life. Das finds ethical life in everyday efforts to ‘allow life to be renewed, to achieve the everyday, under conditions of...catastrophic violence that erode the very possibility of the ordinary.’ (2012: 134). The ordinary is juxtaposed against exceptional violence in this formulation, and ethics emerges as the practice of achieving the everyday despite the rupture of violence. Similarly, Al-Mohammad examines how ethical life emerges between subjects in the aftermath of, and in spite of, the pervasive violence and suffering of post-invasion Iraq (2010, 2012a, 2012b). By way of contrast to Das and al-Mohammad’s work the violence of boxing is not a state of

exception against which ethical life is articulated in an effort to re-establish the ordinary. Rather, the violence and attrition of the sport constitute the fabric of the ordinary; they are a constant presence through which ethical life is lived. This violence and attrition is engrained and anticipated in the quotidian practices of training (chapter 1), and bouts (chapter 2), and ethical life emerges from these violent but ordinary practices.

Two featherweight boxers, Anna Ampiah and Fatiou Fassinou, expressed this understanding of boxing as inherently violent eloquently when discussing their futures in the sport one day:

Fatiou: When you get some small money in boxing you have to stop, its bad to go on, it fucks you.

Akimos: Yeah maybe forty years, you stop when you are that young because it's bad for the body.

F: No, you stop as soon as you get some small money.

Leo: Why do you have to stop?

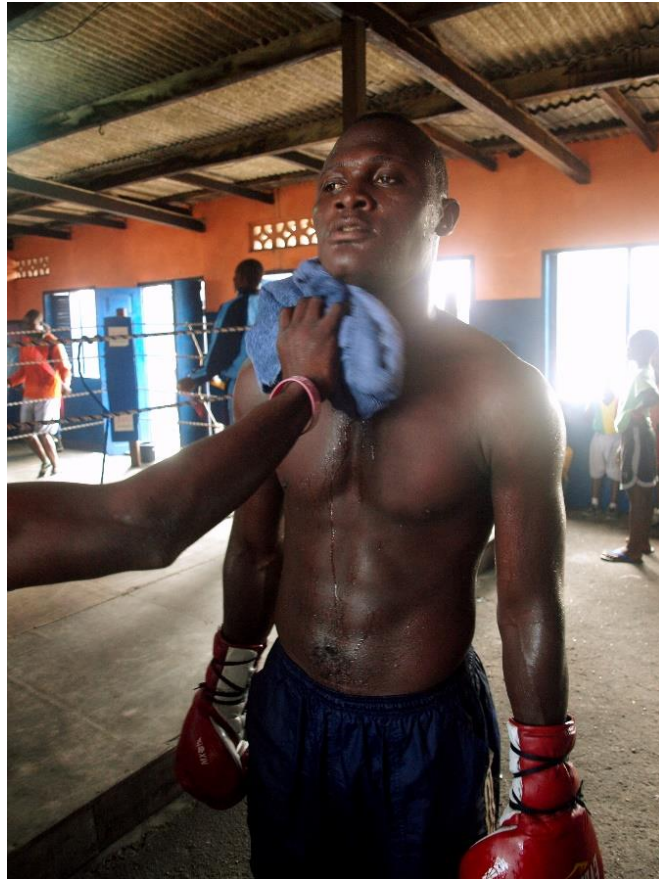
F: Punching is a sickness; it makes your body sick. Look at those who keep going, it fucks them.

Boxers and coaches have complex relationships with the knowledge that boxing leads to long-term injury and impairment. Fatiou and others described regularly their “love” for “the game”, but also reflected on the risks of “loving” an inherently violent and damaging activity. If punching is a sickness, then what follows is an account of how relational subjects emerge through that sickness in the quotidian interactions and practices of the gym.

Boxer and Coach

A coach's work in the gym is filled with small and intimate acts of care and service. Coaches lace gloves, towel boxers down, wash mouth-guards, massage shoulders and check boxers' weight. These are all actions which could feasibly be done by boxers alone, but coaches insist

that these are their role. Having helped boxers into their gloves, coaches feed boxers water and spray it over their heads between rounds rather than allow them to drink for themselves. These acts of service challenge the idea of linear hierarchy between coaches and boxers.



Korley towelling sweat from Emmanuel Martey I

When boxers spar they are helped into and out of foamy head guards and sparring gear by coaches and have soaked t-shirts and shorts peeled from their bodies, all physically intimate acts of dressing and undressing. Coaches smear Vaseline onto boxers' brow-line, nose and cheek-bones before they spar to help blows glance off these bony, protruding features likely to take the most punishment. Cuts or bruises sustained here would likely be described as *pila*, rather than *sha*, injuries with a long term impact on the boxer's capacity to train and compete. The care of an experienced and skilled coach is highly valued by boxers, who complain when Vaseline is too thick or poorly applied, when gloves are too

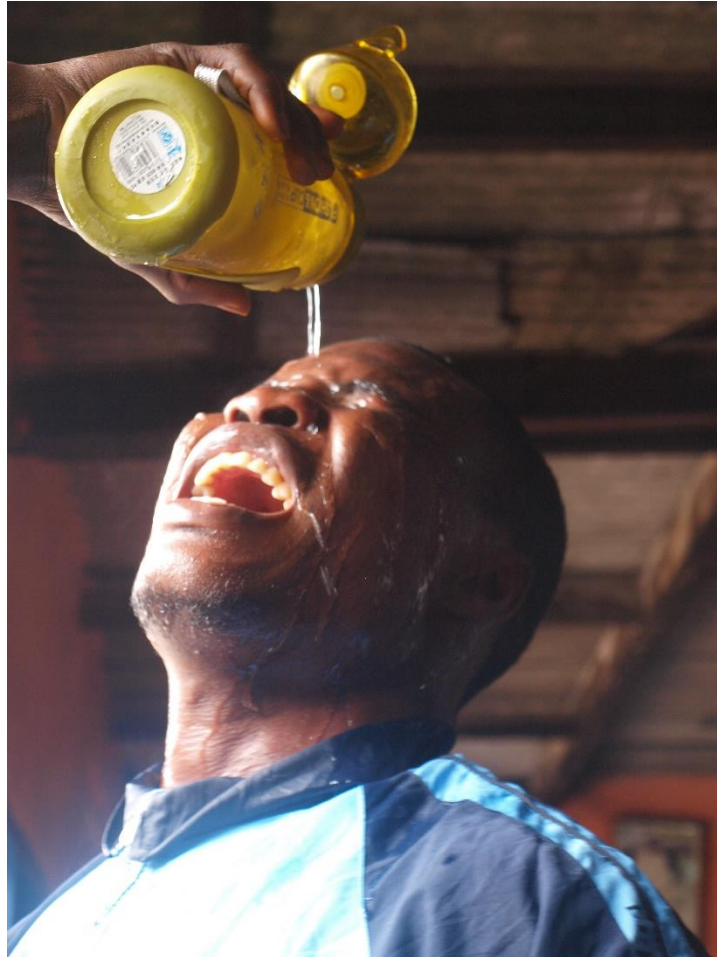
loose, or when a head guard is poorly fitted. This care is experienced and delivered as tactile and somatic – felt rather than abstracted or cognized (Jackson 1989).



Korley towelling sweat from Emmanuel Martey II

Knowledge of a particular boxer gained by working with them and others reveals how tight they prefer their gloves or head guard; coaches' hands feel the tension required for gloves to stay in place, their fingers feel the thickness and adherence of greasy Vaseline on skin as they smear and rub. Between rounds of sparring, coaches attend to passive boxers in the corners of the ring; feeding them water, pouring it over their heads and down their shorts or splashing water into their faces to cool them, reapplying Vaseline, fanning boxers and rubbing sweat from their bodies. In the corner, coaches also often lower their voice and deliver advice and instruction regarding the boxers' work in the ring. Their faces draw close to one another and they speak in quick, hushed tones, almost whispering to their charges as they fan, water and rub them.

These tactile acts of care and service work against the ever-present possibility of harm to the boxer in training, against the attrition of the sport. Aside from these very obvious moments of care, coaches and boxers also understand infliction and augmenting of pain and suffering in training to constitute care. The following sections outline how boxers are nurtured and affirmed through the physicality of training. Simultaneously, I trace the dangers of this physicality in relation to the body as a finite resource.



Coach pouring water over a boxer.

The Body in Pain

‘Boxing is not about fighting, boxing is about condition. Without condition you are not a boxer.’

Washington

“Condition” is a regular topic of conversation in the gym. At first glance it refers to a boxer's fitness levels; the capacity to repeat movements at high speed over time. Maintaining “good condition” was often explicitly cited as an important goal for boxers. However, “condition” is not simply a way of conceptualising fitness, but involves an acquired ethical understanding and experience of pain and physicality.

During a typical training session, the gym is filled with the slap of leather on leather, the swish-click of skipping ropes, the shuffle of feet, the rustle of tracksuits and grunts of exhaled air. Above this all, Washington paces the gym and shouts “Endure!”, “Work and endure!”, “feel it! Feel your training!”. Boxers “work” actively to “endure” the sensation of training and are encouraged to “feel” the pain of their work rather than seeking to ignore it. After shadow boxing and doing punch-based exercises in pairs or on punch-bags, boxers are told;

‘Remove your gloves and bandages [the cotton bandages which boxers wrap their hands with]. Bring your mats for exercises, lie in the ring. Exercises!’

“Exercises” refers to body-weight-based strength and conditioning practices, including push-ups, sit-ups, squats, various types of abdominal crunches, leg raises and neck-raises. The explicit purpose of exercises was to “improve condition”. The other “exercises” aligned with “improving condition” were interval training on the heavy bags (hitting either as hard or as fast as possible, and sometimes both, for a given time period), sprints and timed running. Outside the gym, “roadwork” (jogging) was also considered central to “condition”.



Korley pouring water over Emmanuel Martey

A description from my field notes shows how pain relates to ‘condition’ in exercises:

After boxers finish working the heavy bags, the coaches help them out of their gloves and unwrap their hands. Washington paces the gym, wearing his trademark matching tracksuit – this one is from the 2011 Amateur Boxing World Championships and bears the words “Road to London 2012”. Osman and Korley squirt sachets of water into boxers’ faces as they squat on the edge of the ring skirt. Washington adjusts his matching turquoise snapback and announces: “Everybody into the ring for neck

exercises!”

The boxers lie flat on their backs in the ring, their feet towards the centre and their heads and necks suspended over the edge, about a foot off the ground. “Neck exercise” involves dropping the head and neck as far back as it will go off the edge of the ring skirt, then raising the chin back towards the chest. This nodding movement is repeated as fast as possible for a given time. Washington announces that the professionals will do twelve minutes and the amateurs six. He waves to Korley who shouts “begin!” and starts his stopwatch.

As we work Washington shouts “Endure the pain, work through the pain, keep working, if you can endure the pain it is good for you!”. He paces the edge of the ring and squirts cold water over our bodies. He singles out boxers for praise before gently chiding me; “Leo is going in slow motion, is he a robot, is he on a film?”. The next minute he crouches beside a boxer's head and drops his voice to a whispers “work, keep working, endure! You are a boxer, you must endure!”. Felix, a Nigerian professional, drops his head back and rests. Washington is over him in a flash. “What is this Felix! Are you a boxer? Work, Felix, endure! The pain is good for you!”. Felix shakes his head and reluctantly begins to nod again.

I find this exercise extremely difficult and am relieved when Korley shouts “six down! Amateurs do stretching”. Pools of sweat surround the ring every 3 feet or so, dripping off grimacing faces as they bob up and down like manic nodding dogs.

As coaches implore boxers to “work!” and “endure!” they encourage and augment boxers experience of pain. “Exercises” are necessarily painful in the Attoh Quarshie and pain is conceptualised as something which is “good” for the boxer. After the above session I asked Washington why Felix kept stopping. He explained that:

‘eye seke (Ga - he is mad). He doesn't like to do the exercises properly; he doesn't like to endure. But he wants to be a boxer, how can you be a boxer if you don't want to endure? But what can I do? I cannot make him [do the exercise] by force.’

Willingness to “endure” is a key attribute of a “boxer” here. Coaches do not inflict pain directly; rather coaches and boxers largely agree that boxers cannot and should not be physically forced to complete “exercises” or training. This momentary pain of exercises is

understood as *sha* by boxers who might be heard to say '*esha mi*' – *it pains me* - mid-exercise or when a coach demands to know why a boxer is resting during exercises. The use of *sha* here points to a visibility of pain, a sense of pain as being affirmed and clearly present rather than in any way in doubt (Scarry 1985). The immediacy of *Sha*, alongside its implications of visibility, presence and affirmation, reflect Das (1998) and Livingston's (2012) assertion that pain does not ultimately isolate, but demands response and affirmation as it is expressed. As coaches set physically painful exercises and as they demand that boxers 'work', 'endure' and 'feel' the pain of their labours they recognise and affirm the embodied experience of the boxer in pain. Pain becomes a relationship between the boxer and the coach, in which the role of each party as 'coach' and 'boxer' is affirmed, rather than a tool of isolation or objectification.

After intense conditioning sessions boxers might note that '*ewo ehe*' – *I have pain inside me*. However, often this is followed by a reminder from a fellow boxer that '*ke owo ehe ehie, obana hewale*' – *If you have pain inside you (woehe) it is good, because you will become strong*. *Sha* and *wo ehe* here are used to articulate specific experiences of pain – as immediate, visible and present, and as a lasting experience of the condition gained through an exercise. In each instance, boxers' endurance of pain is recognised and affirmed by coaches and in doing so the embodied experience of pain becomes ethically inflected as beneficial.

To 'endure' *sha* is to gain condition, and to be granted recognition by others as a particular form of subject – a boxer. Whereas inflicting pain speaks to dynamics of power and authority outside the gym (violent disagreements are fairly common in Ga Mashie, as is beating as a physical punishment), *Sha* in the gym, and *wo ehe* as its lasting corollary, are understood as relational and beneficial experiences of pain. Walking home one day with Osman we discussed coaches' authority in the gym and I asked him about how and why coaches punish boxers. He explained that:

'If a boxer does something wrong you can make him do squats or arm presses until the end of the session. The boxer thinks you are punishing them and they feel pain. But you [the coach] see that they get better condition. So it isn't a punishment, it is helping them. But they don't see it like that...because they are in pain. So when you punish a boxer for doing something wrong, you are actually helping them.'

Osman's words highlight that this shift from *sha* as an expression of authority to *sha* as care must be learnt. Coaches mediate the auto-infliction of pain by boxers and in doing so position themselves as 'helping' a boxer. Boxers acquire a new ethical understanding of the experience of pain as they participate in training, are punished and do exercises. As Osman augments *sha* during exercises he understands himself to be caring for his boxers. Boxers voluntary engagement with painful 'exercises' affirms the coach as an ethical actor - a good coach. Pain is neither isolating nor objectifying (Scarry 1985), but rather to engage with pain as *sha* actualizes one's subjectivity as a boxer, and to augment *sha* realizes one's subjectivity as a coach.

One afternoon a middleweight boxer named Emmanuel Martey articulated how *Sha* as a positively inflected experience of pain is augmented by coaches' efforts. We had just finished a conditioning session focussing was on squats and explosive jumps. As we worked boxers switched between grunts of pain and suffering, and laughter at the almost comical severity of the exercise. After we finished I sat outside the gym with Emmanuel talking through the session. I had recently returned from a trip to the UK and Emmanuel commented that I had become less fit while I was away. I agreed and noted how hard training was that day before Emmanuel nodded and said:

'Nnane ewo ehe'

My legs are sore/have pain inside [from training]

'Shi Ke esha, obana hewale'

But if it [training] hurts [*sha*], you will get stronger

Although training is evidently painful and demands that boxers 'endure' their suffering, the use of *sha* and *ewo ehe* positively inflect this suffering as improving strength and condition, and thus benefitting the boxer. Inflicting and experiencing suffering in the gym affirms the coach as a caregiver and the boxer as a physically fit, and both as ethical actors. The use of

sha and *wo ehe* here point to this shared experience of pain, and form part of a language through which boxers' pain is not understood as isolating or inspiring doubt (Scarry 1985) but as mutually affirming.

Despite constructing pain as care, training also brings the risk of *pila* - painful injury and lasting corporeal damage. Where *sha* and *wo ehe* articulate experiences of pain as shared and affirming, *pila* addresses violent objectification through the physicality of training. Coaches carefully manage the intensity of training, anticipate and monitor boxers embodied experience in training to prevent injuries, fatigue or illnesses such as heat-stroke and exhaustion during training. The tactile processes of care described earlier are central to coaches efforts in this regard. Washington described how bad coaches liked to punish their boxers with exercises by making them work too hard, resulting in injured and ill boxers. By contrast, a good coach knew when his boxers should rest, avoiding the fatigue and exhaustion of over-training or more acute dangers such as dehydration and heatstroke. As they watch training, coaches continually ask how boxers feel, touch and visually assess their bodies for signs of damage and illness, assess boxers experience of acute pain and suffering understood as *sha*, and monitor pre-existing ailments or pains understood as *wo ehe*. Should they suspect an incidence or risk of injury or illness coaches withdraw boxers from training or change their exercises.

Washington expanded on the coach's role as a caregiver and the logic of coaching as care-work when discussing a boxer who had emigrated from Ghana to the USA one afternoon. Some time ago, Jonathan had been involved in three world title fights, the last two against the same opponent. He had won none of the bouts, but the bouts had differed significantly. The first fight lasted the full 12 rounds (neither boxer was knocked out or knocked down), and Jonathan lost a close points decision which many saw as favouring his opponent, the home fighter.⁸ The following two fights were against a different opponent; the first was ruled a no contest (no winner) as the bout was stopped prematurely when the two boxers accidentally clashed heads opening a large cut over Jonathan's opponent's eye in the third round.⁹ The fight, Washington observed, was close and Jonathan looked to be the stronger fighter. For these first two fights Jonathan trained at the Attoh Quarshie under Allowey and

⁸ I expand more on the power dynamics and risks of fighting abroad in chapter 4.

⁹ A fight stopped because of an accidental cut, like this, is ruled a No Contest if the stoppage happens before the fourth round. From the fourth round onwards, the judges' scorecards are used to give a result.

Washington's guidance.

In the third fight, against an opponent many perceived Jonathan had bested over three rounds previously, Jonathan was knocked down in the first round and suffered what Washington described as a 'bad knockout' in the second. For this fight Jonathan had been offered a contract abroad and had trained for the bout in the USA. Reflecting on this fight, Washington said:

'The difference is that the trainers over there don't care for the boxers like we do. If you care for your boxer, you have to make them do things properly...not drink alcohol, do training properly. When he [Jonathan] went there, I don't know which coach they gave him. But they didn't prepare him well. Maybe if he was drinking or smoking, or in the gym if he was not working hard, they don't mind. That is the way for coaches over there, they don't care if you are not doing it right. When he was training here, we cared for him.'

My point here is not to suggest that coaches care more in Ghana than the USA. Rather, Washington's comparison highlights the point that care for the boxer is a central concern of the coach, and an idiom through which coaches conceptualise their work. Bad care through the ineffective regulation of lifestyle and a lack of physical intensity in training, leading to a lack of condition, led to the 'bad knockout' – a violent and significant incidence which recalls the fragility and finite-nature of the boxer's body. A 'bad knockout' is a form of objectifying violence recognised to damage rather than affirm the boxer, violence understood as *pila* rather than *sha* or *wo ehe*.

As coaches anticipate and augment boxers' pain during 'exercises' and through myriad moments of tactile care and service, both boxer and coach emerge as specific forms of subject in relation to one another. Care work here is both conceptual and practical. Coaches realign boxers' conceptual engagement with pain so it is understood as help and care rather than authority and subordination. Coaches also attend corporeally to the boxers' pain, literally feeling, watching and listening to the boxer's pain so as to avoid the possibility of harm.

The coach-boxer relationship straddles a dynamic of authority and deference which speaks to the dependent and co-constitutive relationship between these subjects. Webb Keane

suggests a shift from 'the ordinary non-dialectic sense of 'recognition', [in which] people recognize actions and identities in terms of things of which they *already* have some understanding' (1997: 14), to a dialectic understanding of recognition as 'subject to the playing out of an interaction between us' (1997:15). Through tactile acts of care, by sharing in and augmenting boxers' pain and through the corporeal experience of a well 'conditioned' body, coach and boxer emerge as ethical subjects when they acknowledge one another as caregiver. The mundane physicality of training outlined above orientates ethical engagements with the experience and infliction of pain to affirm subjects in relation to one another, rather than subordinate and objectify. Ethical life is embedded in these quotidian practices and relationships rather than being produced at moments of rupture or moral challenge (Das 2007, 2012, 2014).

Working Together

Much of boxers' work in the gym involves interacting with other boxers and an ethic of care similarly shapes these interactions. During a training session Joshua Clottey, the gym's most successful professional, warms down beside the ring while a group of amateur boxers shadow box in the space around him. The amateurs shuffle and bounce, light-footed as they throw punches into the air. As they move they occasionally bump into each other. Joshua is knocked off balance mid-stretch by one such collision and a hasty apology follows before the offender shuffles away. Clearly frustrated, Joshua shouts above the hissing and rustling for the amateurs to stop what they are doing. He tells them that shadow boxing is not only to practice throwing punches, but to "learn where you are. You have to know where you are, stop bumping each other! OK? Work!". The coaches nod their agreement and as Joshua leans into a hamstring stretch Washington shouts over the mass of bodies "work! Don't bump!". Whether explicit or implied, space in training exists in relation to those who occupy it. The immanence of others in training is most apparent when boxers train in pairs and groups.

Interactive exercises vary from "leading and padding" - catching a light jab with the back-hand glove, and throwing one in return with the forehand glove, to full sparring in the ring. Boxers also worked in pairs during "exercise" and conditioning, in pair-based stretching, and mutual massage. Pair-stretching and massage, much like the work of coaches on boxers, are

tactile practices of care which require an attention to the state of another's body – its size, flexibility, weight etc. - and to the other's felt, corporeal experience. When massaging one another, stretching or complete "exercises" together boxers must judge the intensity of the other's somatic experience and shift their tactile work to respond to this felt-experience of the other. Boxers often complained or commented if a relative novice was overly-rough when massaging or stretching their partner, or voiced their pain if they were being stretched to a point that they risked injury. However, a massage is not meant to be completely comfortable and experienced boxers would often grimace with pain or grunt slightly as coaches or boxers massaged them – responses carefully noted by the masseur. Attention to the other's somatic experience is central to pair work. The following sections trace moments of care through increasingly attritional forms of pair-work involving punching.

Combat School

"Combat school" involves two boxers standing close together with little movement away from one another, and trading many low-power punches. In Korley's words:

'You do combat school so that you can learn how to defend a punch, how to move out of the way and when to punch. If you are throwing your hands hard [punching hard], then you cannot think about how to defend or to counter because you just fear those blows. You only think about not getting hit, you don't think about *boxing*. So that's why in combat school it is low tempo [low power].'

Done right, combat school benefits both boxers, allowing space for each to develop their technique. Combat school is explicitly *not* about physically dominating the other, as others have argued that the physicality of boxing is (Wacquant 1995, 2004), but about creating a safe space for learning. Boxers require a cultivated understanding of the meaning of punching beyond physical domination for combat school to constitute a process care and recognition.

Emmanuel, a neighbour of mine and a professional boxer, described how it is the responsibility of both boxers to help the other in combat school and to create a physical interaction from which both could benefit. I found combat school with Emmanuel and other professional boxers relaxing and controlled. Emmanuel's care in maintaining the flow and

exchange of blows between us by not hitting hard and allowing me time and space to respond to his movements also offers an account of our relative skill disparity.

Like “exercises”, combat school also presents the risk of *pila* and unethical violence. More experienced boxers often complain about partners who hit hard and attempted to dominate one another during combat school. Coaches are often preoccupied with policing the intensity of combat school, striding around the gym shouting at boxers to “keep a low-tempo” and issuing “exercise” punishments to those who do not. Misrecognition of the interactional quality of combat school makes it dangerous – an experienced boxer who can punch with potentially dangerous power and accuracy (such as Emmanuel), is unlikely to do so as they understand that combat school is about creating a dialogic space to develop rather than physically dominating the other. Conversely, an inexperienced boxer with less technical proficiency is more dangerous in combat school because they do not appreciate the dialogic purpose of the exercise, and the ethics of physicality involved. Inexperienced boxers and those with a reputation for hitting hard in combat school (almost always relative novices) were often pitted with much more experienced boxers. Osman explained that the reason was threefold – experienced boxers could defend themselves effectively from over-zealous novices and therefore avoid any injury or damage which might befall a less skilled boxer, they could control the flow of the interaction to an extent using their superior technical skill, and finally:

‘Because they know what combat school is supposed to be, they cannot go *gidigidi* [onomatopoeic Ga word for fast and intense]. Even if the novice is hitting hard, they can just go slow and do good combat school.’

An experienced boxer is expected to practice “good” combat school irrespective of the intensity of their partner’s work. Their awareness of the ethics of physicality in this context – what “good combat school” should be like – informs the intensity of attrition of their work, thereby avoiding lasting damage to either party and affirming them as an ethical actor in the gym. A skilled boxer becomes a skilled caregiver when they effectively navigate the dangers and benefits of pair-work through controlled and tempered physicality. By anticipating the skill-level of a less experienced boxer and punching accordingly Emmanuel positions himself as an ethical actor in the gym – as a “good” boxer. In this sense, violence and physicality does not necessarily constitute care in the gym.

Sparring

Whereas combat school is ideally interactional with minimal attrition, sparring is the most attritional form of pair-training in the gym and most closely resembles a bout. Sparring is ethically subtle; a socially charged exchange of punches rather than simply a “practice fight”. This section analyses sparring as care-work. In sparring boxers simulate a bout wearing well-padded 16oz gloves (in contrast to 10oz or 8oz gloves worn in competition), head guards, mouth guards and abdominal guards which protect the hips and groin. Sparring sessions are not scored, but are supervised by the coaches who assess boxers as they work. Sparring has implied moral guidelines which reflect the relative skill, social standing, experience and aims of the boxers involved (see Wacquant 2004: 77-79). Positioning oneself as an ethical actor through sparring requires the boxer to successfully articulate their understanding of sparring as beneficial yet dangerous, and as dialogue-with rather than subordination-of the other.



Sparring in the gym

Washington described the continuity between sparring and other pair-based activities as part of a boxer's progress in learning the sport:

'We have sparring and controlled sparring. If I am teaching someone to box and they are sparring, then I will start them with just the left hand sparring, just the jab. Then, if they are improving, we will change to just the right hand, and then just straight punches, no hooks. They learn control, they have to improve those punches. If I see improvement, we will go to low tempo sparring [with] both hands. Then if they have improved, I will go to full sparring. That is the test...where they can throw their hands hard. It is a test to see if they have really learnt anything.'

Washington controls sparring by banning certain punches, and were boxers to contravene his instructions they were given "exercise punishments" or removed from sparring. Sparring is understood as a necessary part of training for a fight, but is also the most problematic and ambivalent activity in the gym. Sparring can lead to lasting forms of damage which affect boxers' future capacity to fight, earn money and realise their aspirations in the sport; injuries including facial cuts, broken noses, broken hands and torn or strained muscles are not uncommon, and as noted previously the long-term neurological damage of sparring is well known. Simultaneously, sparring is absolutely necessary for boxers' pre-bout preparations. Boxers often described how physically intense "hard sparring" was enjoyable, improved skill and "condition", yet also carried the risk of injury and "wearing down" the body. Enjoyment and a willingness to be over-zealous in sparring was a constant concern of coaches, and much attention went in to managing sparring so as to create adequate intensity but avoid injury through over-zealous physicality. As a risky activity sparring requires trust from all three parties involved – the coaches supervising and the two boxers in the ring. The "test", in Washington's words, is not only of technical skill but of whether the novice has learnt the ethics of physicality in sparring.

Washington, Osman and Alloway described how sparring should only be practiced close to a fight, in preparation for a bout. Intense sparring occurred in the Attoh Quarshie only prior to scheduled bouts, whether amateur or professional. This ambivalence and danger is summed up by Washington:

'Ideally before a fight someone will spar five times, maximum. Because sparring can be bad for you, you can only spar a certain amount before you use up your body, and

your body will fall apart...You see these guys who have sparred too much and their bodies are not working properly anymore, like James Toney [a Ghanaian boxer named after the famous American middle-weight James Toney. Both now suffer from considerable neurological damage], you only have a certain amount and you have to make it work for you.'

Here the body is conceptualised as a finite resource which is both strengthened and depleted by the attrition of training. Violence in training has real and lasting consequences, personified here by one of many significantly neurologically-damaged boxers whose speech is slurred and cognition reduced. Such damage and the physical injuries acquired in sparring and competition are described as *pila*, rather than *sha*. The gym community is acutely aware of the paradox that sparring is necessary and even enjoyable yet damaging, and much work goes into managing this tension.

The ambivalence of sparring was demonstrated when two amateurs, Sam and Afloso, sparred one afternoon. Sam boxes at Bantamweight (56kgs) and Afloso at light flyweight (49kg). Washington was orchestrating the sparring and as the first round wore on he became critical of Sam's work. He shouted at the pair to stop before lambasting Sam in Ga:

'Ofee Sparring aloo o no?'

Are you doing sparring or are you fighting?

'Ke ofee sparring, sani o wa le.'

If you are doing sparring, you must help (*wa*) him.

'Ke o pila le, te o wa le tee?'

If you hurt (*pila*) him in sparring, how are you helping him [*wa le*]?

'Wa le ye sparring, ejaake jile o gym-mate.'

Help him in sparring, because he is your gym mate.

'Wa le ye sparring ka ji le, aloo ma ji bo!'

Help him in sparring, don't beat (*ji*) him, or I will beat you!

'Box!'

Here *pila* does not have the same continuity with “condition” as *sha*, and the two are explicitly juxtaposed against one another. The ambivalence of the violence of sparring is here announced through the juxtaposition of *pila* and *wa*, and *wa* and *ji* (to beat). While *sha* can be understood as allowing relational subjects to emerge through the recognition and augmentation of others’ pain, and as such be conceptualised as help - *wa* or care, *pila* is juxtaposed against *wa*.

Ji is often used to refer to the violence of a street fight or altercation outside the gym. In a boxing context, *ji* was often used to describe a one-sided competitive bout. As such *pila* is used to describe the physicality of Sam’s work as undermining the potential of pair-work to be a process of joint attention, mutual benefit and affirmation. *Ji* – beating – connotes violence as objectifying and subordinating, rather than as a way of allowing the other to learn and emerge affirmed through sparring. Sam has failed to articulate himself as an ethical subject who understands and can practice the violence of sparring so as to affirm and care for Afloso here. The juxtaposition between sparring and beating (*ji*) points to the complex ethical inflection of violence in the gym. I now explore the violence of sparring as care through a detailed account of a sparring session between me and Obodai Sai, a professional middleweight.

Sparring with Obodai

In April of 2015 I sparred 4 rounds with Obodai as he prepared for a fight later that month. Obodai is a professional middleweight boxer, a former commonwealth champion, and one of the senior boxers at the Attoh Quarshie. Obodai had been sparring with several amateur boxers to prepare for his bout. As he sparred Washington’s voice rose above the clatter of the gym, imploring Obodai’s sparring partners on:

'ma le, ma le wa! Work! Work!'

Hit him, hit him hard! Work! Work!

Washington again uses the verb “*ma*” – to hit, rather than “*ji*” – to beat, distinguishing the

physical violence of sparring from other instances of violence within the sport (a bout, for example), and from violence outside the gym (*ji*).

One Tuesday afternoon, Washington told me I would be sparring after I had warmed up. Obodai nodded at me in the changing room as we wrapped our hands and pointed to himself and me before saying “sparring”. Back out on the gym floor Korley pushed a head guard onto me, helped me into a pair of sparring gloves and smeared Vaseline onto my face; over my brow, on my cheekbones, my lips and on the bridge of my nose. After checking my face, he raised his right hand and slapped my glove before telling me to go to the corner of the ring where Osman leant on the ring ropes watching Buju (another amateur boxer) spar with Obodai. Osman told me to shadow box and stay warm while I waited. I moved around the floor beside the ring and felt cumbersome in the foamy sparring gear. My stomach had tightened; I was nervous about sparring with Obodai whose technical skill is far superior to mine.

I wrote up the sparring session that evening and the following extract details my impressions and memories:

When Obodai hit me with his first effective punch, an upper cut right into my nose, he immediately stopped, stepped back out of range, made eye contact and nodded at me. He had dropped his hands down below his face and squared his shoulders out of his boxing stance. I was fine but a little confused by what was going on. I thought I might be hurt, not because I felt it but because he had stopped so suddenly. I looked over to Washington, who told us to keep boxing. Obodai returned to his boxing stance – left foot half a pace in front of right, gloves high in front of his face and shoulders turned to the right, and came back towards me. The sparring didn’t stop for the rest of the round.

At the end of the round Washington ushered me out of the ring and told me to relax, I would go back in later. Buju ducked between the ring ropes and went to work for a round with Obodai. Between the rounds Osman told me to work harder and to hit Obodai harder.

During the second round Obodai was rougher; still defending a lot but throwing more punches and shepherding me around the ring with shoves, nudges and carefully

placed steps that cut off my path and forced me to take another. Mid-way through the round I threw a combination of straight punches and a left hook at him. He blocked. As I finished the combination he countered with a left hook to the body. He was too quick and landed cleanly just under my ribcage. There was a deep, hollow thump, and suddenly I was breathless, no wind in my lungs, pain moving up through my chest. Obodai's hands immediately returned to the high guard position, he stepped back, made eye contact with me and waited. In a moment of panic I had curled into a tight guard, elbows protecting my ribs and gloves protecting my head. I expected him to throw more shots but instead he stayed back, made eye contact again and waited for me to move forward.

Towards the end of the round Obodai caught my eye with the laces of his glove. He stepped back again and motioned to his eye. Washington told us to continue but Obodai still didn't move forward. Allowey asked what was wrong and Obodai motioned to his eye. In the corner, Allowey rinsed off my eye and peered into it before pushing me back out into the ring. Just as we are about to start again, Korley called time on the round. Obodai slapped his glove against mine then hugged me.

I asked Osman why Obodai dropped his guard and beckoned me toward him as we moved together in the ring, or deliberately dropped his hands and stayed close enough for me to hit him. Osman explained that Obodai might want me to hit him so he can bob, weave and try to counter-punch, or possibly that:

'e tawo o male, ni o wale'

He wants you to hit him, so you help him

'He is encouraging you. He wants you to come forward, to release a punch to him [rather] than fear him.'

I asked why I was sparring with Obodai, given that Obodai is much more skilled boxer than me. Osman explained that Obodai "needs sparring" and he therefore needs others to "give him sparring":

'He [Obodai] needs to be hit. It is so that he will not get body pains when they hit him in the ring [during a competitive bout]. If you are going to fight, you need a little

bit of sparring...so that if you go to the ring and they punch you, you won't feel much pain. You have the pain there already [from sparring], so then when you come to fight if they hit you, you will not let your head down, or your legs stop. You learn all these things in the gym.'

To hit hard during sparring is, in this instance, positively inflected as "help". Osman explains the violence of sparring as help and care through a constellation of contextual factors. These included; career trajectory – Obodai is an experienced, professional boxer with an impending fight; space – this form of care is appropriate in the space of the gym not outside; the infliction of pain as transaction – "he needs you to give him sparring, to give him that pain"; and finally a shared understanding of how the body experiences pain – "if you give him pain now he gets stronger then when they hit him outside he does not feel body pains". Ethical violence in sparring is thus contextually dependent and demands a detailed knowledge of the subjects involved. The physicality of sparring as care is learnt in the gym, as boxers learn to respond appropriately to the relations of hierarchy, skill and power between sparring partners. In this sense again ethical violence in sparring is a relationship which accounts for, rather than happens in spite of, the specific histories and relative skill disparities if those involved.

Sparring as dialogue

Although Obodai threw fewer punches than I did, and far fewer than he could have done, he did throw and land punches. Sparring is a dialogue not only in terms of punches thrown but also in the sense that boxers move around and in relation to one another. Reflecting on the session, Osman explained Obodai's behaviour in the ring:

'Obodai is taking care of you when he is sparring with you because he could hit you hard, but he does not. He has to tap you so that you know when to raise your gloves, to teach you. When he does hit you hard you will feel pain, but then you know you have gained.'

Leo: What do I get from the sparring?

‘You learn when to defend yourself, then you leave your fear of pain. You know now that you can be in the ring with whoever...because you have been sparring with better people [i.e. Obodai] and you have felt the pain from that. That is why it says above the ring, ‘No Pain, no Gain’.’

When Obodai hit me with the left hook to the body I gained in two ways according to Osman; firstly, I learned to defend myself better in future – in this instance keep my right elbow tucked close to my body to protect my ribcage. Pain and the punch here is pedagogic and an act of care by Obodai which nurtures my boxing skill. Secondly, from Osman’s perspective boxers gain confidence from the pain and physicality of sparring. For Obodai or any more experienced boxer to inflict a measured, painful punch works to affirm the self-belief of their sparring partner. The violence of sparring is carefully practiced in order to affirm and benefit the sparring partner, rather than objectify or subordinate them.

Sparring partners’ perspective shifts from fearing the physicality of sparring as an expression of physical dominance to understanding it as beneficial. Sparring is understood as a process of mutual affirmation and caregiving rather than subordination and dominance. This shift recalls the conceptual shift from enduring pain as a punishment to experiencing pain in training as a means to developing “condition” and articulating oneself as an ethical subject in the gym. Boxers must learn to engage with physicality as care, rather than this understanding being naturalised or assumed. As a result, the ethics of physicality engrained in the mundane and quotidian practices and relationship of the gym defines the boxing family as a discrete moral community. The capacity to care effectively for others and recognise the particularities of their subjectivity – as a more or less experienced boxer, as having an impending fight and even as a coach or boxer – is the central practice of ethical life in the gym.

As Obodai spars with me he carefully manages the flow of punches between us and regulates the backwards-and-forwards of our exchanges. By allowing me to come forward and throw many punches, and conversely stepping backwards after he has thrown an effective punch, Obodai ensures that the majority of punches are being thrown *at* him rather than by him. For

my part, and with the encouragement of the coaches, I throw more punches than him. If I did not punch, I would not be providing the physicality that Obodai “needs” in Osman’s words. Similarly, were Obodai to throw too many punches, he would prevent me from “giving him sparring”.

The physicality of sparring is dialogic; as boxers spar they develop a corporeal sense of the other’s experience. Boxers feel the intensity of both the blows they land and those they receive, they listen to the sound of gloves landing on bodies, taste blood in their mouths, experience changes to their visual field, proprioception and balance, and observe similar changes in others all the time as they move and spar with one another. An effective punch elicits pain and force in the receiver, but there is also a tactile quality and appreciation by the boxer who throws it. Should a punch land with little force, graze the target or glance off both boxers feel it, albeit in ways which are corresponding, analogous and co-dependent. As boxers move and spar together they constantly attend to and anticipate the other’s pain and sensory experience through their own somatic experience. Only by doing so can they spar ethically. Ethical sparring is a practice of being *with* another, and a practice of attending to the other’s somatic experience by recognising the way in which it corresponds to and is anticipated by one’s own somatic experience.

Cavell asserts that the infliction of pain is violent when that pain is not acknowledged or recognised (in Das 1998: 94). Sparring as a dialogic practice of care complicates this proposition. Whilst sparring is understood as violent and attritional it can also be affirming if the other’s subjectivity and embodied experience is adequately attended to and recognised, and their interests responded to and accommodated. To refer back to Washington’s words, the “real test” of sparring is not only in a capacity to physical violence, but in recognising the dialogic nature of physicality in sparring and learning to anticipate another’s experience in your own sensory experience. By doing so, the violence of sparring can become caregiving rather than subordination or objectification.

Ambivalent Care

The gym community constantly negotiates the ambivalence of a necessary physicality which both helps and harms, builds and destroys. Despite the possibility of care, the sport remains

violent and dangerous. In Joshua's words:

'When you sign that contract, you know you are going to get hurt. You are going to get cut. You will get pains in your body. You are going to get knocked down, knocked out. That is boxing.'

As boxers train, compete and move through their careers they weigh up a "love" for the sport and its financial incentives against the attrition of the sport and an understanding of their bodies as fragile and finite. The ethics of physicality and the value placed on care in the gym reflect the sport's violence and the boxer's vulnerability. Understanding care and help in the gym through the concept of 'mature care' (Pettersen 2008) allows space for asymmetries of power and ambivalence within caregiving relationships. Effective care in training requires a nuanced understanding of the relative skill, experience and position within the gym community between those training together. 'Mature care' also recognises that care is not extended from a giver to a receiver, but emerges as parties interact with one another and actively recognise one another's work. Boxers and coaches are affirmed as subjects when they recognise and respond to others' efforts to give care, and in doing so recognise the fundamentally social nature of the violence of boxing.

In order to care effectively, and in doing so to articulate themselves as good coaches, boxers and sparring partners - to become ethical subjects - the gym community develops what Cavell (1998) and Das (1998) call a language of pain. As coaches demand that boxers "work", "feel" and "endure", and as sparring partners respond to their tactile engagements with one another, they anticipate and affirm the pain of others, caused and augmented by their own actions. *Sha*, *pila* and *wo ehe* reflect the gym community's complex conceptual understanding of violence and pain as both potentially affirming and possibly objectifying. Through the quotidian and mundane practices of training, boxers and coaches respond to the ambivalence of the violence which pervades their sport. In doing so they articulate themselves as effective caregivers and ethical actors. Ethical life in the gym is not juxtaposed against a return to the ordinary in the wake of violence. Rather, a descent into the ordinary (Das 2007) is a descent into violence, physicality and attrition as fundamentally social and morally ambivalent practices.

Conclusion

In the mundane processes and practices of training boxers are constantly engaged in managing the tension between violence as affirming and objectifying. The ethics of physicality in the gym recognises that training risks corporeal harm and objectification, in the same moment that nurturing and affirmation become possible. Care as a primary concern of the gym community is complex, relational and not necessarily altruistic. To care and to be cared for in the Attoh Quarshie requires a nuanced understanding of ethical physicality in subtly different training practices and recognition of subjects as relational and dependent. Given its dangers, training demands a corporeal attention to the (often painful) experience of the other. Pain in the gym is thus best understood through the relationships it forms, rather than as the denial of subjectivity.

In the introduction I discussed the metaphor of the boxing family used to describe the boxing community in Accra. This chapter has shown that boxers and coaches emerge as subjects through dialogic acts of care and recognition in the gym. Boxers emerge as subjects 'in the particularity of [their] relations to others' (Faubion 2001:12). Boxers do not understand kinship relations to be made through boxing, but rather boxers and kin emerge as subjects in analogous ways.

Good care in the gym is unavoidably physical, at times painful, always relational and often risks harm to carers and the cared-for. It is always more complex than benevolent altruism delivered from one party to another, and the boxing family care for one another in unconventional ways, through pain and physical violence. A cultivated corporeal attention to the other's embodied experience and a contextual understanding of the ethics of physicality as a responds to and recognition of others subjectivity are necessary for effective caregiving. Navigating the attrition of the sport is an ongoing project in the gym. Boxers from the gym very rarely box one another competitively and as such the ethics of physicality presented in this chapter is not complicated by formal competition (although informal forms of competition and rivalry animate considerations of ethical practice in the gym). In the next chapter, I consider how care and dependence take shape during bouts and in public competitions. Having traced how care requires an orientation towards the somatic experience of others, chapter two further explores the idea of ethics as other-orientated and extrinsic rather than reflexive and self-orientated.

Journeyman and Opponents:

Dependence and Care in the Ring

Standing in the ring under the hot stage lights, I took Vaseline from a greasy mass on the back of my hand and smeared it onto Obodai's brow. Sweat re-formed in countless pin-prick beads across his chest where I had towelled him down moments before. As I worked the Vaseline in, Washington poked his head through the ropes and issued instructions to Obodai in staccato bursts. Behind Washington the crowd cheered, jeered and hurled abuse through the heavy tropical night. The referee leant against a neutral corner and sipped water from a bottle as sweat patches began their slow, inexorable spread across his white shirt.

The previous day I had travelled East from Accra to Keta, a town on the coast one hundred miles east of Accra which hosted regular boxing events at an upmarket beach resort. Two professional boxers from the Attoh Quarshie were to fight there, so Washington travelled to work their corner and took me as his assistant. 15 boxers, 4 coaches and I squeezed into a hired minibus and set off. As we drove the boxers ate and drank voraciously; many had starved themselves to 'make weight' before the weigh-in that morning and now they replenished without remorse.

Keta straddles a narrow sandbar between the Atlantic and a brackish lagoon and the weighty thump of the breakers remains audible from the vast lagoon's mirror-edge. Faded colonial facades line the beach. Receding slowly into the sand, they stand an inch shorter every time we return to fight at the venue. Each year as the sandbar is eroded a little further Keta's thread of land grows more precarious.

In the ring that night the rhythmic clump of the waves drifted over the crowd's clamour and the saline air picked at our nostrils as we worked. Obodai stared forward intently as Washington spoke, expressionless as he took instructions. The two only once made eye contact, for no more than a few seconds, when Obodai turned to face Washington and my

hands ceased their work on his face. Washington spoke rapidly in a moment of strange intimacy; words only for the boxer yet shouted above the noise of the crowd, beneath the glare of the lights. I rinsed Obodai's mouth guard and slotted it back into his open mouth. He chomped down, stretched his lips wide and stood up as the referee called "seconds out".

The crowd clamoured in anticipation; shouts of "*ji le*" (beat him) rose over the anonymous faces beyond the ropes, imploring those within to violence. Washington whipped away the stool and I clambered through the ropes. Obodai looked calm as he stood and a voice came over the PA system;

'round 2...'

Obodai bounced, shifting his weight from toe to toe. The referee; white-shirted and black-bow-tied stepped forward and cut the diagonal of the ring with outstretched arms. As he beckoned the two boxers forward Washington issued a final instruction:

'Ka male wa, e behe wale.'

Do not hit him hard, he does not have strength.

Obodai won the fight by technical knockout in the third round.

-

If it were the case that professional boxing consists of 'delivering potent blows...so as to inflict superior physical damage and, if possible, render him [the opponent] incapable or unwilling to sustain the contest' (Wacquant 1995: 495) why would Washington instruct Obodai not to hit his opponent hard, and justify this by noting his opponent's lack of strength? I take the apparent paradox of this vignette as my starting point to propose that the violence of a boxing match is better understood through practices of care than competition and physical subordination. Whereas chapter one explored the practices of training in the gym, this chapter examines practices of care, recognition and dependence during public fights.

The boxing family use idioms of care and help to describe fights and the work that surrounds them as well as work in the gym. These understandings again resonate with ‘mature care’ (Pettersen 2008, Pettersen & Hem 2011) insofar as they are relational and reciprocal, neither solely given nor solely received, but emerge between subjects. As in training, practices of care are in tension with the violence of the sport and during bouts care is juxtaposed against public performances of hyper-individualism and violent domination. Care-work in and around the ring maintains relationships of dependence and mutual constitution between members of the Accra boxing family. Much like in the gym, the boxing family is delineated as a moral community during bouts through the capacity to care, not through individuals’ ability to physically subordinate or dominate an opponent. This complicates recent analyses which suggest that global sporting industries shape sports-persons (often young men) into “neoliberal selves” who are highly individualist and motivated by the logic of competition and economic rationality (Besnier and Brownell 2011, Besnier 2015).

Throughout this chapter I refer to the mutuality of boxers’ being, a term borrowed from Marshall Sahlins’ *‘What Kinship is – And is Not’* (2013). In doing so I do not mean to suggest that boxers become kin through the sport, or support Sahlins’ claim that the sociality of kinship precedes any form of genealogical connection. Rather, I draw on the descriptive work that ‘mutuality of being’ does without repeating Sahlins’ claim on the nature kinship. ‘The mutuality of being’ refers to ‘persons who are members of one another, who participate intrinsically in each other’s identity and existence’ (2013: 62). Building on the other-orientated ethics of care outlined in chapter one, I show how boxers ‘participate intrinsically in each other’s existence’ as they compete (or choose not to). In other words, being a boxer is an emergent quality between subjects rather than an inherent property of the individual, and competition demands recognition of this mutuality. I leave the question of how this mutuality relates to kinship relations for chapter three. Showing how boxers account for their mutual being in the ring furthers the proposition that ethical life in the Accra boxing family is other-orientated (al-Mohammad 2010), and that ethics is better understood as a concern for being-with others than as a practice of reflexive self-fashioning according to arbitrary moral codes.

I begin by examining practices of care between boxers and coaches prior to and during a fight. As in the gym care is necessitated by the risk of corporeal damage in a bout; intimate physical care is a corollary of the attrition of a fight. As such, an ethnographic attention to

the violence of boxing demands an attention to the practices of care which respond to this violence. I then explore the figure of the journeyman – a boxer who fights regularly and often loses – to address boxers’ understandings of dependence in the ring. A responsibility to care for journeymen stands in stark contrast to the fetishized hyper-individualism which dominates the public performance of boxing. Journeymen also understand their work between the ropes as care work, and in doing so highlight the mutuality of boxers’ being. Boxers recognise the disjuncture between this mutuality and fetishized hyper-individualism, and work to publicly perform individualism whilst also caring effectively for one another.

Finally, I look at two fights to examine how relationships of dependence and mutuality, and the care-work that goes in to maintaining them, are juxtaposed against moments of physical violence and competition. Boxers must become proficient in a “front-stage” performance which foregrounds individualism and violence, and a “back-stage” logic which foregrounds care and dependence. Rather than the ‘specific honour of the pugilist’ existing in the ‘[refusal] to concede or kneel down’ (Wacquant 1995: 496), the capacity to care effectively again delineates the boxing family as a moral community.

Hyper-individualism and the neoliberal self

Central to professional boxing across the world (and in Accra) is a public narrative of hyper-individualism through the violent, physical subordination of the other (Wacquant 1995: 495). Professional boxing celebrates individuals and much of the ceremony and rules of boxing (both amateur and professional) create a sense of equal opportunity between competitors. There is no handicapping, weight limits performatively create two boxers of equal mass (and implicitly of the same size), equipment (gloves, mouth guards, boots etc.) are regulated evenly and boxers are allowed the same support in the ring – two seconds and a cut-man who are allowed 1 minute to tend to the boxer between rounds. The public performance of professional boxing often involves much pre-fight effort – during interviews and press conferences, through publicity materials, at the weigh-in and in ring-walks – to stress the potential that *each* boxer has of winning the bout.

An emerging anthropological literature on global sporting industries argues that in a moment when “neoliberal forces” have come to dominate global industry, professional sport has

become increasingly attractive to young men in the Global South seeking global and social mobility (Besnier & Brownell 2012, Guinness & Besnier 2016, Esson 2013). Aspiring athletes are attracted by the huge financial rewards seemingly available by playing and competing overseas. These financial incentives have become increasingly present in aspirants' lives through the advent of satellite television and the broadcasting of international sporting events in distant locations (Besnier 2015), and more recently through the proliferation of images of successful athletes abroad available through social media (Hann 2018). Simultaneously increasingly wealthy sporting industries deliberately recruit athletes from Global South locations, again increasing the apparent possibility of success in global sporting industries. The success of relatively few athletes' rests on the participation of many more who do not realise their ambitions, many of whom are left vulnerable to exploitation, people trafficking and a lack of economic and social opportunity as a result of their investment in their sporting aspirations (Hann 2016, 2018, Guinness & Besnier 2016).

Reflecting scholarship on neoliberalism in North America (Gershon 2017, Gershon, Cohen et. al. 2017, McGuigan 2014) and South-East Asia (Long 2013: 176-98), these authors argue that global sporting industries produce 'neoliberal subjects' who are highly individualistic, understand social relations through market rationality and are constantly in the process of reflexive self-improvement (Besnier 2015). On the surface, boxers as hyper-individualised, sovereign subjects in violent competition with one another, and with aspirations of global mobility and vast financial success, seem to reflect this argument and logic. However, this chapter shows that public performances of violent competition and hyper-individualism mask relationships of collusion and dependence that permeate professional boxing in Accra. Although they compete in a global sporting industry driven by logics of profit and competition, in practice boxers do not resemble the ideal 'neoliberal self' sporting industries purportedly produce. To begin understanding why this is the case, and why Washington instructed Obodai as he did, I turn to a previous trip to Keta and examine how boxers are enmeshed in relationships of dependence that are not defined by competition.

Face-offs and Friendship

Boxers in Accra often know each other well and have longstanding relationships – often (but not always) friendships. This became abundantly clear as boxers travelled to and from fight-nights in Keta and elsewhere. These prior relationships frame boxers' behaviour in fights and complicate the idea that professional boxing is structured and driven only by competition. While boxing communities elsewhere are no doubt similarly enmeshed in social relations beyond the ring and the gym, the tight-knit and geographically specific nature of the Accra boxing family results in a unique intimacy between boxers, as I go on to show.

A year before Obodai's fight against Jonathan Tetteh I travelled for the first time with a group of boxers and coaches to Keta. Having successfully tipped the scales below their required weight, several of the boxers who would fight the next day posed for press photographs after the weigh-in. Stripped to the waist as they would be in the ring, they struck poses reminiscent of posters and publicity material for title fights in the US, the UK and Western Europe. Often poses included a "face off" or "head-to-head"; boxers standing face-to-face, their shoulders and hips square, staring directly at one another's faces. As the cameras snapped boxer's the boxers remained steely, emotionless and intense. Such poses recall a global aesthetic of professional boxers' lean bodies and an internationally prevalent repertoire of confrontational poses struck prior to fights. Boxers consume these images on television and YouTube, see them in posters displayed across town recalling local and international bouts and have first-hand experience of the "right poses" from prior weigh-ins in Ghana and abroad.

The confrontational posturing ended abruptly as boxers walked away from the scales and dressed. Boxers chatted and joked, and their body-language shifted to a physicality of support, intimacy and affection; they held hands, hugged, leant and lay on one another as they snoozed in the shade – postures reminiscent of masculine sociality – and shared food after the excruciating experience of staving themselves to make weight. The juxtaposition between the contrived confrontation of the photographs and the physical support and intimacy which replaced it was striking. I spoke later with a number of the boxers and coaches about this change and asked whether the boxers knew one another. Asare, head coach of the Wisdom Gym, explained:

‘Yeah they are from Accra, they know each other and they are friends, of course! But that is boxing, it is business, you fight your friends.’

The size and geographic concentration of the Accra boxing community shapes this level of familiarity between opponents. With a relatively small number of active professionals at any given time, the vast majority of whom train in Ga Mashie and many of whom spend much of their free-time there, coupled with the fact that many of these boxers are a similar age (in their twenties and early thirties) and have boxed together for years, means that boxers often know each other very well. Their relationships are not only dominated by the oppositional nature of competition. Boxers must navigate the proximity of close relationships alongside the attrition and violence of the sport.

Tactile Care and Violence

The venue at Keta is an upmarket resort on the southern fringe of the sandbar, sandwiched between the town and the sea. It comprises a large walled compound containing a bar, kitchen, bbq and a boxing ring erected on the dance floor. Plastic chairs are arranged in rows between the bar and the bbq, and tables beneath rattan shades line the edges of the compound. Outside the compound two rows of cuboid concrete buildings nestle in the sand and contain the resort’s en-suite rooms. Several hours before the first fight began a Beninise boxer named Fatiou Fassinou arrived at the venue. Fatiou wore heavy, carefully braided dreadlocks which reached past his shoulders and he was greeted warmly by Washington. The two had not seen each other for several months. Although he began boxing in Benin, Fatiou now trained regularly at the Attoh Quarshie and lived in Ga Mashie for several months at a time as he trained and fought.

At the time, Fatiou held a regional title and boasted only three losses in some 25 fights. Boxers like Fatiou were referred to as “prospects”, “good boxers”, or boxers who are “moving up” - climbing world rankings and potentially able to fight for higher purses in the future. Later that night Fatiou would fight Ray, another boxer from the Attoh Quarshie. Unlike Fatiou, Ray did not have such a successful record at the time, with a recent string of losses. Ray fought regularly and boxing was his principle source of income. Ray is a “journeyman”, a ubiquitous descriptor in professional boxing which I elucidate in more detail

shortly, but one with specific meaning in Accra. Ray had taken the fight at late notice - four days - and had travelled with the other boxers in the minibus earlier that day.

Before the fight, Fatiou and Ray sat with Washington and me on the veranda of one of the small concrete buildings, bathed in the ethereal light of a single blue bulb. On Washington's instruction, Fatiou and Ray stripped down to their underwear, stepped into abdominal guards, slipped on baggy t-shirts and pulled satin shorts up to their waists; Ray's were black with a white trim and read "Ray" down one side while Fatiou's were yellow with green and red trim, the colours of the Beninoise flag. As they changed, Washington took two pairs of black Adidas gloves out of Fatiou's bag and laid them carefully on a plastic chair, checking that each was laced properly. What followed was a well-worn pre-fight preparation routine. The three men spoke little as they worked, and slipped easily into the various roles and positions required to do so. A detailed account of these preparations shows how the violence of boxing is immanent in the intimate practices of care which precede the bout. I witnessed the moments described below in countless changing rooms, tents and quiet corners prior to bouts across the country and outside.

Once the two had changed Washington spun one of the plastic chairs around and told Ray to sit down. Straddling the chair, Ray rested one arm at a time over the chair's back while Washington, now facing him, carefully wrapped each of Ray's hands in layers of cotton gauze, surgical padding and plaster-tape. I handed Washington rolls of gauze, tape and wads of padding from a bum bag as he worked. The bum bag is Washington's corner-kit; the equipment used to prepare, care for and treat a boxer prior to a fight, in the minute's break between rounds during the fight and (where necessary) to treat injuries afterwards. It contains sticking plaster tape, surgical tape, scissors, cotton buds, Vaseline, several small brown medicine bottles containing adrenaline and blood coagulant for treating lacerations, a thick piece of smooth steel called an enswell used to reduce facial swelling through a combination of cooling and pressure, and rolls of cotton gauze and padding.

Ray's hands were wrapped with care and attention (as professional boxer's hands always were before fights), following a specific patter which built up layers of gauze over his knuckles and around his wrist to support the joints and prevent fractures. As Washington worked Ray sat quiet and calm, turning his hand or making a fist as Washington's hands moved quickly and carefully around his. Coaches take extreme care over hand wrapping, and

wrapping is considered a specialist job which requires knowledge, training and experience to effectively protect boxers' hands. Fight wraps are more intricate, delicate and protective because the light gloves worn during a fight provide far less protection to both boxers than those worn in training. Asare stressed the importance of proper hand wrapping while I watched him train boxers one afternoon:

'It should be the better coach who is doing the bandages, they are different to the bandages in the gym. You have to do it well otherwise they [the boxer's hands] can break.'

During a fight boxers wear 8oz or 10oz gloves (depending on their weight category), whereas training gloves will be 10oz or more and sparring gloves were always 16oz in the Attoh Quarshie. Lighter gloves with less knuckle-padding deliver more power through the hand, increasing the risk of damage to both the puncher and the punched. A bare body is also a harder target than a leather punch-bag, a pad or even a sparring partner wearing a head-guard, increasing the likelihood of both broken hands and injury to the boxer receiving a punch. A boxer's hands – less protected by gloves and hitting harder objects – are much more vulnerable during fights and hand injuries sustained during a fight are described as *pila*. A broken hand can leave a boxer unable to fight for a period of time or perhaps indefinitely, reducing their income and possibly leading to long-term disability in the broken hand. Boxers openly acknowledged this risk and as a result highly value hand wrapping. Isaac, a boxer from another gym, once described how a coach had wrapped his hands badly prior to a fight abroad;

'I think my coach was more nervous than me. He was worried so when he was looking after me in the corner it was not so good. He didn't take care of me so well and my bandages were not so good, like they were too loose.'

Hand wrapping prior to a fight is a moment of intense intimacy. The coach's capacity to care effectively is made material as boxers' hands are wrapped. Hand wrapping seeks to reduce harm but simultaneously anticipates and facilitates the violence of the bout – allowing the boxer to hit hard without breaking their hand. Hand wrapping is a moment of tactile intimacy. Like the application of Vaseline and massage described in chapter one, effective hand wrapping emerges through a joint attention to the movement of bodies in relation to one another. Ray and Washington move their hands together, constantly responding to and

anticipating the other's movement so as to create an effective wrap which simultaneously facilitates violence and protects the boxer.

Once Ray's hands were wrapped, Washington said "Leo, look after Ray while I wrap Fatiou." Ray stretched and shadow-boxed silently in the half-light, occasionally opening his mouth so I could feed him water and gesturing for me to adjust his abdominal guard or retie his laces. Fatiou took Ray's position on the chair and Washington began the methodical, delicate work of wrapping his hands.

With both boxers' hands wrapped, Washington helped Ray and Fatiou into their gloves. Lacing gloves, like hand-wrapping, requires a specific technique and follows a particular pattern – lacing gloves well is a skilled job and one that Washington, like other senior coaches, insisted on doing himself. Once gloved, Fatiou and Ray stripped off their t shirts, each now glazed with a little perspiration from shadow-boxing. Washington took a wad of Vaseline in each hand and massaged it into the boxers' arms and shoulders. Pre-fight arm massages are a common part of pre-fight preparation in Accra; coaches described how the Vaseline helped blows to glance off, warmed the body and relaxed the muscles before a fight. Fatiou held out each arm to the side in turn and rested his gloved hand on Washington's shoulder. Washington massaged methodically from the forearm towards the shoulder, over the shoulder and up to the base of the neck. He worked in silence, only muttering an occasional "OK" or "Next" as he finished each arm. He then set to work applying Vaseline to the boxers' faces; with faces less than a foot apart Washington layered Vaseline onto the cheek-bones, brow-line, nose and lips of each boxer with more care and precision than in the gym prior to sparring. He worked the Vaseline in with a firm hand, enough to achieve the desired degree of adherence and depth over the skin without hurting the boxer's face. When he had finished, Ray and Fatiou's greased features shone under the blue light. Again the increased attrition of a bout compared to sparring makes careful application of Vaseline to the face paramount, and coaches' heightened concentration and intensity in these moments reflects the violence of the sport.

Washington and I then helped the two boxers back into their T-shirts and sat again on the veranda, waiting to be called to the ring when the current bout finished. The three men chatted quietly and Fatiou reminisced with Washington about previous trips together. The

atmosphere was calm and relaxed, with none of the animosity or steely-stares which happened over the scales at the weigh-in that morning.

The hour before a fight is filled with intimate acts of care between coaches and boxers, acts similar to those performed in the gym but with a heightened intensity which reflects the increased attrition of a bout. As boxers' are prepared for a bout they become less capable of helping or "looking after" themselves as their hands are carefully wrapped and encased in tightly-laced gloves. Increasingly, it becomes the coaches' responsibility to "look after" and "take care" of them. Boxers become dependent on their coach for simple acts of dressing and undressing (removing a t-shirt or re-tying a lace), for the coach to wash and slot-in a mouth-guard, for massaging and for the application of Vaseline to the boxer's face. Coaches also recognise the importance of emotional care for their boxers, particularly if the boxer will fight a skilled opponent. Earlier that day Asare had described how one of his fighters was boxing a difficult opponent:

'He needs some support; it is a big fight for him. I tell him "You're ok. This is a big opportunity; you can get a lot here. You're ready". I talk to him throughout the day and just before the fight, I try to support him, to keep him calm.'

The physical intimacy of wrapping, squeezing, pushing, pulling and massaging the boxer's body, alongside intimate emotional "support" is juxtaposed against the immanent violence of the bout. Moments of "looking after", "taking care of" and "supporting" index violence in the same moment that they seek to reduce harm. Care and violence emerge in relation to one another as boxers and coaches prepare for a bout. A coach who cannot care effectively – either materially or emotionally, is deemed less than useful as Isaac's words show. The care provided by a coach to a boxer before a bout is asymmetric, provided by one party to another. I now turn to look at how the bout itself is understood as a moment of reciprocal care by boxers and coaches, a concept of care akin to Pettersen's logic of 'mature care' (2008). To do so, I first examine the figure of the journeyman boxer in the boxing family.

Journeyman

‘A journeyman is not such a good boxer. He is often losing, but it is his job to fight, it is how he feeds his family.’

Washington

Ray is a Journeyman boxer, as was Obodai’s opponent Jonathan Tetteh. A Journeyman is a loosely defined and ubiquitous category in professional boxing. In Accra, journeymen are often considered reasonably skilled boxers but are deliberately overmatched, resulting in journeymen having a losing record (more losses than wins). Journeymen typically fight regularly, and boxing is often a major source of income for them. Journeymen will often fight at short notice, and managers use journeymen to give “prospects” (boxers touted for future success) experience early in their careers.

Boxing is a zero-sum game – for every winner there must be a loser. Journeymen facilitate this; they are overmatched – and in most cases I came across were fully aware of this. Journeymen fight to be paid, rather than to win. However, reducing their work to being beaten-for-money would belie the complexity of boxing as a relational practice. Journeymen are involved in reciprocal relationships of care with non-journeymen boxers. Journeymen are essential to the sport; their labour creates champions and prospects with winning records and in this sense the industry is dependent on them.

Whilst there were many Journeymen in Accra, few publicly identified as such outside the boxing family. However, among the boxing family the relative skill level of boxers was common knowledge and those considered journeymen were well known. To lose was not considered detrimental or shameful for a journeyman. On the contrary, during the regular lectures that Alloway and Washington gave to the assembled gym-corpus after training at the Attoh Quarshie, they often described being a journeyman as a “good job”. To be a journeyman is a legitimate and respected profession in the boxing family.

To say that journeymen are less skilled than others is an over-simplification; rather, their skills are different. Asare described how beocmign a journeyman often became an option as boxers’ careers progressed;

‘If you have lost some fights, four or five in a row, then you have to think about becoming a journeyman. So I would talk to my boxer about how he can continue in boxing, if he can change to a journeyman.’

Having lost several bouts, a boxer might come to the realisation that they would never become a “champion”, or that they were unlikely to beat better boxers around them. To successfully make this transition, he stressed that they had to realise that boxing was not all about winning. Rather, a successful journeyman should recognise that one could box regularly and earn well without winning. Success here meant providing a reliable income. To be a journeyman was, in this respect, to be a successful boxer. Washington explained that in Accra there were two types of journeymen:

‘You have the journeymen who know they cannot win, so they can just give you rounds. Even before the fight he [the journeyman] knows he cannot win [the bout] so he will not try to win. So your boxer can just box small with him, move around and do enough and then finish. Then you have the second type who thinks that every time he is coming to fight he should try to win. No matter who the opponent is, even if they give him someone [an opponent] who he knows he cannot fit [who is much better], he will still try to win. So this journeyman is also useful because he can give you rounds and your boxer has to be more careful here. But it is good for your boxer to work hard like this. We have both types of journeymen here.’

To box as a journeyman, and to box against a journeyman, requires a nuanced understanding and recognition of the relative skill and positionality (as journeymen, prospect, champion etc.) between those boxers involved. In each case the journeyman ‘gives rounds’ to their opponent and is understood to be in a relationship of mutual care with their opponent as I go on to show.

Both coaches and boxers are aware that being a journeyman comes with a significant health risks, again conceptualised through the body as fragile and finite. Asare elaborated that it was his responsibility as a coach to encourage journeymen to quit, should he perceive that their work was taking too much of a toll on their body:

“If he [the journeyman] is taking a lot of punishment...I have to tell him that he should stop. It’s not good for him...but I cannot force him to stop”

A journeyman's skill lies in their ability to avoid physical damage whilst regularly performing competitive boxing. Their "work" involves the risk of corporeal damage and coaches care for journeymen by leveraging their authority to encourage journeymen to withdraw from the sport if they perceive the corporeal cost is too high. As a result of this risk journeymen often box defensively. To do so requires skill, experience and an astute knowledge of how to address the audience's desire for competition and violence with minimal risk of injury. Bearing this in mind, journeymen I encountered would often retire from a contest if they felt that they were "taking too much punishment", in Asare's words. Whereas Wacquant suggests that 'a pug [boxer] who quits in the midst of battle is branded with the mark of infamy and suffers a veritable symbolic death' (1995: 496), journeymen in Accra who do just this are valued and respected.

Ethics in the ring

Jonathan Tetteh lost to Obodai that evening in Keta by failing to meet a count – failing to stand up and declare himself ready to continue before the end of referee's eight second count following a knockdown. He was fully conscious when he did so. He left the ring not injured or visibly damaged by the bout in part because of the way that Obodai, under Washington's instructions, had cared for him between the ropes. Tetteh is what Washington called the 'first' type of journeyman, a journeyman who understands that they cannot win a bout.

During an interview several days later, Washington reflected on the fight:

Leo: 'What happened in Obodai's fight? Why did you tell him not to hit his opponent hard?'

Washington: 'He [Tetteh] is a journeyman, it's his job, so there is no need to hurt him.'

Given the limited size of the Accra boxing family, Tetteh, Obodai and their respective corners were aware of how little was at stake given the skill disparity between the two boxers. Washington's instructions, and Obodai's subsequent actions, were recognition of the fact that to injure Tetteh was of no benefit to anyone. Washington explained that:

‘If Obodai is hurting so many journeymen, who is going to fight him? How can he build his record? If he can’t get fights, then he can’t get a [good] record and he can’t box, so he has to look after them [journeymen].’

Washington’s words recognise the autonomy of journeymen, who may (and often do) refuse to fight against boxers who have a reputation for physically damaging them. Obodai needs journeymen to box against; to maintain his record and to keep him in practice. A boxer who deliberately damages journeymen will find it more difficult to find willing opponents and therefore more difficult to “move up” or become a “champion”, highlighting the dependence of prospects on journeymen. Washington went on to explain that:

‘The boxing family is not sooooo so big, so if you are always hurting people so badly then it is more difficult for you, you won’t get fights. Who is going to fight you?’

The limited size of the boxing community, and the familiarity which is evident between boxers, shapes what constitutes ethical behaviour and the imperative to care for others. Later in the interview, Washington described how Tetteh had recently suffered a violent knockout:

‘They beat him very hard the last time. I don’t think he has recovered yet, but it is his [Tetteh’s] job so how can he not box? That is why I said *e behe wale* [*Ga* – he doesn’t have strength], because they beat him so hard that he is still weak. So we had to look after him.’

By “looking after” Tetteh, Obodai and Washington acknowledge their dependence on journeymen and simultaneously articulate themselves as ethical actors by recognising that Tetteh has a right to work. Their care accounts for Tetteh’s dependence on boxing as a source of income, on his “right” to work without excessive injury, and reflects Obodai’s dependence on journeymen in order to maintain his position as a prospect or championship boxer. Obodai and Washington’s work recognises the inherent violence of the sport, the dependence of prospects on journeymen and the fragility and finite nature of boxers’ bodies. The care that they practice is a corollary of this recognition, and emerges concomitantly with the violence and corporeal harm of boxing. The caring relationship between prospect and journeyman in the ring is asymmetric, it accounts for and reflects that one party has more

capacity to physically damage the other. However, this asymmetry does not preclude reciprocity.

Care and Exclusion

Care between the ropes is not always practiced effectively. To make this point Washington described a bout some months before when a journeyman had been knocked unconscious. During the bout the opposing coach repeatedly told his boxer not to hurt the Journeyman but was ignored. Washington was angry and shouted at the winner after the bout. Reflecting on the fight he told me passionately;

‘It is not right to beat a journeyman like that, it is his job to box. How can he do it if they beat him like that every time? The boy [the winner] did not listen to his coach. *Eye seke* (he is mad), *E buu ehe* (he has no respect). But next time it will be him that is like that [beaten badly]. I went to the corner and I told him that. He is not such a good boxer this boy [the offender], he can’t even be an African Champion. George Ashie, Tagoe [other boxers from Accra in the same weight division] they have all beaten him and they can all beat him again. So he will have to turn a journeyman some time. But when he does [become a journeyman], if he is boxing my boxer I will not tell them to take care of him. I will tell my boxer to knock him [out]!’

The offending boxer was perceived to have deliberately disregarded the ethical practice of caring for a journeyman in the ring. As a result, Washington issued a physical threat and excluded him from future relations of care. Reciprocal care here extends beyond care between individuals, it is a relationship between the boxer and the boxing family – if you take care of the family then the family will take care of you. If you fail to care effectively then the future care of the boxing family is withdrawn.

The offending boxer also failed to recognise his future as intertwined with others’. When Washington compares him to Ashie and Tagoe, boxers in the same weight division, he is describing how the boxer’s future is intertwined with and mutually constituted by the careers and skills of these others. The offending boxer *must* become a journeyman not only because of his own skills but because of his skill relative to others’; his future in the sport is

dependent on and connected to theirs, it is relational. By deliberately knocking out the journeyman the offender has disregarded this dependency and relationality, and failed to recognise his future as co-constituted. He has acted as an autonomous individual rather than a relational subject. Being part of the Accra boxing family is to recognise and articulate oneself in relation to others; embedded in hierarchies of skill and occupying different, but dependent, positions such as Journeyman and Prospect. Effective care requires an understanding of this relationality and hierarchy. It is the capacity to care effectively and appropriately rather than the ability to physically dominate an opponent in the ring which delineates the boxing family as a moral community. The practices of care which constitute the family are withdrawn when care is not reciprocated and relationality denied.

Reciprocal Care

While effective care for a journeyman places a prospect in a relationship of reciprocity with the boxing family, care is also conceptualised as reciprocal in the ring itself. Although the relations between journeyman and prospects or championship boxers are clearly asymmetric, this asymmetry does not preclude reciprocal care. I return now to Ray and Fatiou's bout to understand such asymmetric relations of care and reciprocity. While in the above examples the burden of care lies with the more proficient boxer, journeymen are also conceptualised as agentic caregivers.

On the night of Ray and Fatiou's bout Washington and I worked Fatiou's corner – Washington in the ring and me passing him Vaseline and water, holding the spit bucket and slipping the stool under the ring ropes. Ray was attended by coach Quaye, head coach of the Fitsqauregym, and an assistant. The fight went the scheduled eight rounds and Fatiou won comfortably on points. As the fight wore on the crowd hurled the usual shouts of "Kill him!", "Beat him!" and "*ji le*" in Ga. Much abuse was directed towards Fatiou using the word "Rasta", referring to Fatiou's dreadlocks, and imploring Ray to "Beat the Rasta-man". The attitude of the crowd was in stark contrast to the quiet atmosphere in the half-light of the veranda twenty minutes earlier. The audience's appreciation of the bout was clearly different to the boxers' and revolved around a narrative of competition and physical subordination.

After the final bell Washington and Quaye slipped between the ropes, peeled back the tape on the boxers' wrists and wrenched the tight-fitting gloves from their hands. Fatiou's hand was held aloft by the referee before the group slipped under the ropes and picked their way back through the crowd, out of the gap in the compound wall and into the darkness beyond.

Back on the veranda Fatiou and Ray sat together and talked through the fight, smiling as they re-counted particular moments. After changing Ray said to me:

'Leo, did you like my fight? I was just helping [Fatiou] tonight. I took the fight on tuesday, I only had 3 days sparring. Did you like it?'

I told him that I had enjoyed it. Ray smiled back and repeated:

'I had to help him today, the other guy he was going to fight pulled out, so I helped him.'

Ray, like many journeymen, recognises his agency in "helping" his opponent. Conceptualising his work as "help" positions him as a moral agent in the boxing family, and recognises the mutual dependence between Journeymen and Prospects/Champions. Ray's emphasis on "helping" also foregrounds mutual benefit rather than the physical subordination of an opponent. Ray helps Fatiou by providing him with some practice and a win on his record. In doing so Ray not only affirms but actively contributing to Fatiou's subject position as a boxer with a winning record. Ray's reflections point to the reciprocal nature of care-work in the ring, a reciprocity which recognises both the asymmetry and dependence between boxers. While Obodai and Fatiou care effectively for the Journeymen they box, Ray and Jonathan *also* position themselves as caregivers and ethical subjects whose work in the ring benefits their opponent.

The performance of physical violence and the fetishized individual which the crowd appreciate in the bout emerge through a joint attention to the dependence and mutuality of those in the ring. This joint attention is physical and corporeal, expressed and understood in the strength of a punch, in Obodai's decisions to step back and allow Tetteh space to move or in the decisions not to push-home a flurry of damaging punches. As in the gym, a shared somatic attention recognises the asymmetry and dependence between boxers and allows appropriate care during an inherently violent interaction. Boxers emerge as prospect and journeyman, and are recognised as ethical actors and part of a moral community through

effective care-work between the ropes. Again, the potentially objectifying violence of boxing is concomitant with the potential for subjects to emerge affirmed; care-work prior to and during a bout addresses this tension. Care requires a corporeal orientation towards the somatic experience of the other (as outlined in chapter one), and a recognition of the relationality of subjects in the ring.

Dependence and Competition

The opposing narratives of hyper-individualism on the one hand, and dependence on the other often take the form of a front-stage/back-stage performance. To explore the tension between these performances, I analyse two exhibition bouts. An exhibition has no winner or loser and is not listed on boxers' official record. In exhibitions boxers wear more protective equipment (heavier gloves and head guards) in order to reduce the likelihood of injury and lasting damage to either boxer. Exhibitions are a regular occurrence in Accra, much more so than I have encountered elsewhere, and often happened at the funerals of members of the boxing family - "people who boxing was part of their life or part of their family" in Washington's words. Exhibition bouts further complicate the assertion that violent competition is the fundamental principle of a bout. Competition as a concept implies both cooperation and antagonism; winning a bout requires the violent subordination of the opponent, but competition also requires collusion as boxers compete together under specific rules. A tension between individualism and cooperation is thus inherent to any attempt to "win" in a structured competition. However, a close attention to exhibitions shows that the social dynamics of a bout are subtler than competitive cooperation. Like boxing a journeyman, boxing correctly in an exhibition demands a detailed knowledge of those involved; their gyms, career trajectories, personal histories and relationships within the boxing family.

Charles Adamu vs Leo Hopkinson

In early 2015 Washington's father died. His funeral was held in March at Washington's aunt's house in central Ga Mashie. As is typical of Christian funerals in Accra, the body was carried

from the morgue to the family house where it was laid in state on a Friday. That evening a wake keeping was held outside the house; friends, family and acquaintances gathered to listen to music, dance, eat, drink and watch the exhibition bouts.

Boxers from the Attoh Quarshie often assisted at the funerals and weddings of coaches' families and that weekend a group served drinks and food, and helped with the considerable setting-up and dismantling required for hosting several hundred guests. Around 3pm the boxers were told to go home, rest, and return at 7pm with their boxing gear. That evening I joined Korley, Jonathan, Afloso and Sam lounging on plastic chairs beneath the canopies we had erected over the square that afternoon. We listened to Afrobeats blast intermittently from the monolithic speakers either side of a small table, where the DJ tapped at a laptop. Presently Washington appeared from the warren of alleys beside the house. He led us through a gate and into an adjacent courtyard. There, in the darkness of the empty yard he told us to change, warm up, and wait; we would box later.

We changed in the shadows, hidden from the party by a breeze block wall. As the music rose and fell and guests began arriving we shadow-boxed to warm up. Washington reappeared through the gate to tell us that Jonathan and Prosper would box first. He took the two aside briefly before turning to me:

'Leo, you will box next. Charles Adamu is coming down to help us, you will box him. It is an exhibition like controlled sparring. Just throw light punches, tap [he stood back and threw his hands out quickly, imitating fast, light punches]. No heavy punches ok?'

Adamu is an experienced professional boxer and a former commonwealth title holder who has boxed a number of current and former world champions. He is far more skilled than I am, this was common knowledge among the boxing family.

A few minutes later Prosper and Jonathan came back through the gates, their bodies glistening with sweat before they stepped into the courtyard and were shrouded by the dark again. They were followed by Korley and Osman, each carrying a pair of foamy sparring gloves and a head guard. As Korley laced me into the gloves he smiled and reiterated Washington's instructions:

'Controlled sparring, no heavy punches. Just move, tap, move, ok?'

He rammed the headguard over my ears – still warm with Prosper’s sweat - and rubbed a little Vaseline onto my brow line before grabbing my sweat-towel and leading me out into the light of the square.

As we stepped out his attitude changed: whipping the towel above his head in circles and shouting *Blofunyo, Blofunyo!* (White Man!) he led me forwards, pushing and shoving a path through the crowd. Many more Attoh Quarshie members had arrived and stood among the crowd, crushed around the corners of the makeshift ring – a square gazebo with rope tied around the four corners and a string of naked bulbs slung from its roof. As we reached the ring Korley pulled up the rope and ushered me in. The gesture was wholly unnecessary but Korley’s movements echo those of the coach parting the ring ropes to help his boxer into a real ring. On the way to the ring Washington stopped me, gripped the back of my neck and pulled our heads close together before issuing a last instruction:

‘Controlled sparring Leo, no heavy punches.’

In the ring Korley whipped the towel again half-laughing as he shouted “*Wo ba ji le, Blofunyo ba ji le kpa kpa!*” (We will beat him [Adamu], the whiteman will beat him very well). From behind me I heard two boxers from the Attoh Quarshie shouting out “*Ji le!*” and “*ma le waa*”. Korley slotted my mouth guard in and making eye contact, he dropped his voice: “remember, controlled sparring. OK?” I nodded. The referee, a professional called Helen, beckoned us forward, indicated our belt lines (to mark the line below which a low-blow would be called) and made us touch gloves before we began.

Towards the end of the bout shouts of “attack!”, “*ma le!*” (*hit him*) and “*ji le!*” (*beat him*) from the crowd became more frequent and Korley jumped, shouted and gesticulated wildly in the corner. When Helen called time on the last round I walked over to my corner, a little blood forming around the corners of my mouth. Grinning from ear to ear Korley rubbed the back of my neck and tugged my gloves and head guard off. Back in the darkness of the yard I thanked Charles, and we talked quietly about the funeral as we stretched and changed.

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The exhibition involves two contrasting narratives; one of hyper-individualism and physical dominance and one of mutual dependence, care and cooperation. The cooperation and mutual understanding of the bout is obscured by a public performance which emphasises

physical subordination of the other.

Backstage, Charles and I were given instructions which foregrounded appropriate care in the ring, and Charles' work was conceptualised again as "help" by the coaches. The instructions were reiterated to me as this was the first time I had been given the responsibility of boxing in an exhibition. This responsibility is in one sense to the opponent – as any injury or damage could impact their capacity to box in future. It is a responsibility to care effectively, not to compete. Responsibility is also toward the wider boxing family; to injure an opponent during an exhibition was to damage the potential of the entire gym community to compete elsewhere, and in doing so their potential to raise the profile and reputation of their Gym and of Ghanaian boxers. Boxers in exhibition bouts are thus responsible for one another, the gym community *and* the boxing family.

In the shadows of the school yard, or in low tones to the boxer in the corner, Korley, Washington and Osman demand a care which reflects the boxing family's mutuality of being. Publicly they demand the opposite; imploring boxers to physically dominate and harm one another and creating a narrative of individualism through violent subordination. This narrative is aided by the "partisan" crowd – the Attoh Quarshie boxers in the crowd contribute to the pastiche as they shout "*ji le*" and "*ma le*" from the corner, while half-concealed laughs and smiles betrayed their insincerity. Korley's instructions between the rounds were a similarly public performance of violence and individualism; with exaggerated movements (meant to be seen by the crowd) he demonstrated combinations of heavy, powerful punches, before drawing himself closer to reminding me in hushed tones to keep the punches light.

Exhibition bouts emphasise a public narrative of violence and individuality yet foreground an ethic of care and dependence between those boxing. The punches that land between the ropes are not fake and the attrition of the bout is not entirely removed but are shaped by an ethic which foregrounds appropriate care rather than competition and violent subordination.

“Martega” vs “The Wild Hurricane”

Care in the ring does not necessarily mean boxing in “fast and light” as Charles and I did in the vignette above. This became clear during another wake-keeping bout. Coach Allowey, former head coach of the Attoh Quarshie, passed away in early January 2016 from a long-term heart condition. Exhibition bouts between high-profile professionals were organised for his wake keeping as part of a large, lavish and carefully planned funeral. However, one match did not happen as the boxers slated for the bout refused to box. Their reasoning demonstrates further the mutuality of boxers’ being and demonstrates that effective care is not only understood as “fast and light” low-attrition boxing as in an exhibition or a bout with a journeyman.

On the evening of the wake keeping a ring had been erected on an old concrete plinth beside Allowey’s house in Ga Mashie. Around 7pm I joined several Attoh Quarshie boxers loitering by the ring who had recently arrived for the exhibition bouts. We waited as Emmanuel “Martega” Martey, a super-middleweight, went to the officials table to check the schedule for the bouts. Emmanuel returned from the officials table looking concerned. When I asked who he would be boxing he said he had been matched with Habib “The Wild Hurricane” Ahmed. Habib and Emmanuel are both in their mid-twenties, both super-middleweights and are similarly experienced and skilled. They have also been friends since they were children. Because of their relatively similar skill, experience and weight they are widely understood among the boxing family to be future-opponents in a potentially lucrative, competitive fight. With this in mind, I asked Emmanuel if the match was going to be a problem.

Emmanuel: ‘It isn’t good for me to fight Habib. He is my opponent, so we can’t do an exhibition.’

Leo: ‘Why not?’

E: ‘He is my opponent...him and me are supposed to fight because we are the same level. If it is an exhibition then you have to go slowly...But because Habib is my opponent, he is at my level, we can’t box like that we have to box properly. If we box like an exhibition people might be saying that we are not the same level after they

watch. Because he is my opponent and I am his opponent *for real* we can't do an exhibition. Even if we go in there today we won't box like an exhibition, we will box hard with effective punches. So we can't do it today.'

Emmanuel excused himself and I watched as he found Habib in the crowd. After a brief conversation the two walked in different directions. Sometime later Emmanuel told me that he and Habib had decided not to box and had told the officials that they refused.

Unlike prospects and journeymen or Charles and myself, Habib and Emmanuel are not understood to be of vastly different skill levels. Their proximity in skill, experience, age and weight-class indexes a different form of relationality and dependence to those discussed up to this point. By calling Habib "my opponent" Emmanuel references the widely acknowledged fact that the two will one day likely be matched in a competitive, lucrative bout. If they were to box that night *both* would want to prove unequivocally that they are better than the other because of their relative proximity. As the exhibitions are a public performance, albeit one without an official winner, the audience (both the boxing family and the public) will leave with an opinion of who they thought the better boxer was of the two. Both Emmanuel and Habib were unwilling to risk being labelled the worse boxer in public opinion by boxing "slowly", as they know they should in an exhibition. Their proximity as 'opponents' problematizes their capacity to perform care for one another appropriately in an exhibition. Several days later Habib explained to me that their refusal also reflected the intertwinement of their futures as "opponents":

'If we boxed there [at Allowey's funeral] then we had to box properly because we are the same level, which is not good for an exhibition. But then if we do box properly [compete effectively] what will they pay us? Nothing. [Boxers are generally not paid for exhibition bouts, but box as a duty and act of commemoration to the deceased]. Then next time [in a future bout] people will not want to watch us box because they have seen it already, so how can we get paid then? So we told them we would not do it.'

The category of opponent demonstrates the immanence of each boxer in the other. Emmanuel and Habib mutually create a future in which a potentially lucrative bout between them is a possibility, whereas were the "opponents" to box "properly" (to compete effectively in the ring) in an exhibition, this potentially lucrative future would evaporate. The potential

bout presents a two-fold problem; Habib and Emmanuel are unable to box with the physical care appropriate for an exhibition because of their proximity as “opponents”, and simultaneously a bout would diminish the financial prospects of *both* in future. Effective care without the asymmetry of a journeyman-prospect demands effective competition and violence, which affirm the subjects involved as the mutual category of “opponents”. Yet this form of care and affirmation is inappropriate during an exhibition. Emmanuel and Habib’s refusal recognises their futures and finances as intertwined and mutually constitutive.

The decision not to box is made between Emmanuel and Habib and their analysis of the situation reflects their understanding of one another as relational subjects. Habib and Emmanuel are ‘jointly attentive’ (Pina-Cabral 2013:261) to their position; refusing the bout emerges from their mutual-participation in, and constitution of, the subject position of the other as an “opponent”. By recognising their mutuality, they articulate a worldview where they *can* box competitively in the future. As “opponents” they participate in and constitute the life of the other in a starkly different way to journeymen and prospects. Yet, relations between “opponents” on the one hand and “journeymen” and “prospects” on the other both foreground an ethic of contextually appropriate care and highlight the immanence of boxers in one another’s lives – the mutuality of their being.

Ethics and the Between-ness of Being

Many Ghanaian boxers have an active facebook presence and often share images of themselves in training or posed with a raised fist. These poses recall the confrontational and individualist imagery of boxers at weigh-ins and press-conferences across the world. Often posts are captioned with phrases which meditate on their subject; “The actions of men are the best interpreters of their thoughts” captions a boxer with hands on hips, staring straight into the camera; “All roads that lead to success have to pass through hard work at some point” accompanies a boxer half-way through a sit-up. Although ostentatious at first glance, these posts theorise in deliberately abstract terms boxers’ sense of being. They also have a performative element – deliberately mimicking genres of speech and image. However, this does not undermine the fact that captions are carefully chosen.

Sometime after I left Accra a featherweight boxer posted a photograph of himself with another boxer I know well. The two are long-term “competitors”, they have been rivals for a space in the National team for several years and shared a ring many times. In the photograph the two stand side-by-side and face the camera. The near-arm of each is wrapped around the other’s back in a half-hug. The photograph is captioned:

‘The only way to have a friend is to be one.’

The caption is a quote from the 19th century proto-libertarian lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson, although this is not noted in the post. What ties together an apparently banal truism from a proto-libertarian (Emerson), cited by a twenty-something Ghanaian boxer on facebook and Washington’s paradoxical instructions to Obodai that night in Keta with which I began this chapter? Each speaks to the central point of this chapter; that boxers are enmeshed in relations of dependence and recognise the mutuality of their being.

Whilst Emerson was a staunch individualist his words here remind me of an altogether different approach to friendship, Giorgio Agamben’s. In *What is an Apparatus* (2009) Agamben proposes that the category of “friend” describes an immanence of the self in the other, and the other in the self (2009:36). Friendship as a concept speaks to the mutual nature of the human condition, and with it the anthropological questions of what a subject is and how subjects emerge. For Agamben, ‘The friend is not another I, but an otherness immanent in self-ness, a becoming other of the self’ (2004:6). Wahid’s caption echoes this idea that self and other emerge in relation to one another for boxers in Accra, often through the violence of the sport. The relations of mutuality which cross-cut the boxing family emerge in the “face-off” at a press conference, the intimacy and friendship between boxers who will fight immanently, the mutual dependence of journeyman and prospect, or the mutuality of being “opponents”. The mutual constitution of subjectivity is reflected in the foregrounding of reciprocal care as a chief concern in and around the ring. The three emic categories of “journeyman”, “exhibition-bout” and “competitor” each demand different forms of care and reciprocity, and reflect the different ways in which subjects are implicated in one another’s being.

If we understand ethical life as relational rather than a reflexive practice of self-fashioning in relation to arbitrary moral rules or code, as outlined in my introduction and chapter one, then ‘the relationship, the *with* of being – [is] ethical itself’ (Al-Mohammad 2010: 426,

emphasis original). For some time, anthropologists have made the ontological argument that personhood is relational and essentially social (Strathern 1988, Battaglia 1990). Al-Mohammad suggests that questions of *how* lives are lived, rather than *what* a person or world is, are also ontological questions insofar as 'no *what* question proceeds them...there is no logic of life which comes before its living.' (2010: 436). This argument aligns with the idea of embodiment as a paradigm for anthropological research (Jackson 1989, Csordas 1990) which has shaped my attention to the primacy of physicality in exploring the lives of the boxing family. If the *how* of living life addresses ontological concerns it is also an 'eminently ethical' question (Al-Mohammad 2010: 436, Kleinman 2006).

Ethical life for the Accra boxing community demands an attention to being with others, rather than being a reflexive practice of shaping oneself according to normative codes. Al-Mohammad notes that despite the anthropological commitment 'to a notion of the human being as eccentric...our notion of ethics tends invariably towards and is centred on an ethics of the 'self'.' (2010: 437). He goes on to examine how for Oum Hassan, a cleaner in a Basra Hotel, 'the whole project of her life contained her niece as a part of that project' (2010: 441). As this and the previous chapters have shown, boxers' lives in Accra are similarly entangled and relational. Ethical life as a boxer is necessarily a project concerned with others' being, and of being-with others. Boxing demands an attention to the somatic experience of the other in violence and pain (as in chapter one) *and* an attention to forms of subjectivity (journeymen, prospects, opponents etc.) as dependent and immanent in one another. Ethical life emerges as relational subjects are affirmed or denied and as the mutuality of being is lived through the practices of the ring and the gym, rather than through a reflexive construction of self. The entanglements of boxers' ethical lives with the lives of others discussed in this chapter 'indicates not only that [their] existential coordinates are eccentric [personhood as social], but so too are [their] ethical coordinates and responsibilities' (Al-Mohammad 2010: 441). Etic constructions of the "good" (Mol et al 2015) are orientated towards being with others rather than being as an ethical-subject prior to the relationality of subjectivity, and ethical life as part of the boxing community is concerned primarily with the mutuality of boxers' being.

Conclusion

Boxing matches publicly emphasise hyper-individualism, competition and violent subordination. By contrast, much of the effort involved in producing a boxing match acknowledges and perpetuates relationships of mutual dependence and support. In producing these narratives, boxers and coaches foreground an ethic of care which is mutual, reciprocal and other-orientated. The importance of care and “help” as a conceptual framework for boxers work in and around the ring is concomitant with their understanding of bodies as fallible and finite, and boxing as inherently violent and harmful. Care and harm emerge as central concerns for the boxing family in the same moment. Being part of the boxing family requires boxers to demonstrate the capacity to care effectively between the ropes, rather than being predicated on physically subordinating others. While this chapter has examined boxers as relational and dependent subjects, the next chapter explores how the boxing family negotiate the intersection of different forms of relationality including siblingship, being opponents and being competitors in the ring.

'Blood is Thicker than Water'

(un)Doing Relatedness

It is 6.30am on a Friday morning and I am sitting in the club room of the Akotoku Boxing Academy. Akotoku Academy is set back from the street in a large courtyard behind a two storey colonial building. Washing lines heavy with clothes traverse the yard and in the far corner a baker makes hard-crust pastries in a clay oven. There is a ring in the centre of the courtyard, a concrete plinth raised a foot above the dust and patchy masonry of the floor. A rusting metal tube stands rudely at each of its four corners. There are no ring ropes, no padding and no canvas, just a concrete square. The Club Room is a small wooden building on the far side of the courtyard beside the baker's oven. Inside, the familiar smell of sweat, dust and leather pervades and old gloves, head guards and pads hang from the walls on nails. Dog-eared posters of fights-gone-by tell of "judgement night", commonwealth title clashes and "punch time"; of forays into the world of boxing beyond Accra.

Inside I sit on a bench between Washington and Theophilus, head coach of the Akotoku Academy. Daniel Quaye, then coach of the national amateur boxing team - The Black Bombers - stalks up and down the room and Rose, one of a small group of long-suffering boxing referees in Accra, sits on a stool to the left. On the floor in front of us are a set of electronic bathroom scales on a wooden board. We are gathered to weigh boxers in and make matches for fights that evening. Five Boxers from the Attoh Quarshie have already weighed in and now sit outside, chatting, drinking koko – a millet porridge spiced with ginger - and eating bread. They have been "making weight", so for most this is the first thing to pass their lips in 24 hours.¹⁰ Washington, Theophilus, Rose and Quaye chat as we wait for more boxers to arrive and weigh in, and Theophilus teases me about my (lack of) sex life. Tonight there will be a number of amateur bouts at the Prison Officer's Canteen in Labone, a few

¹⁰ "Making weight", "doing weight" or "*bashie*" (Ga – come down, reduce), were terms used to described losing weight before a fight. Boxers generally weighed more than their "fight weight", and when competing would reduce their weight dramatically by controlling diet and hydration, and doing particular exercises. Prior to a fight it is not uncommon for boxers to lose 5kgs or more.

miles to the North East of Ga Mashie. The Prisons Canteen, as it is known, is a regular Friday Night venue for amateur boxing in Accra.

Presently a young man walks in to the courtyard wearing the sandy camoflague fatigues of a prison officer, a light brown neck scarf and a pair of aviator sunglasses. His boots shine, the creases of his shirt are razor sharp and he walks with a lazy swagger. The club room has only two small windows and although it is not yet 7 am, the light outside is in stark contrast to the dark within. As he enters, the man removes his aviators and greets the five of us. He is Jessie Lartey, a prison officer, long-time lightweight boxer for the Black Bombers and the son of coach Quaye. Jessie strips down to his underwear before stepping forward onto the scales. Washington announces his weight:

‘64.5 kg’

Theophilus notes it down in a red A5 school notebook, before Jessie steps off the scales and states his name and club:

‘Jessie Lartey, Black Bombers.’

All five of us in the room already know it. Jessie dresses and leaves a few minutes later. As Theophilus enters Jesse into the ledger I notice the name Jerry Lartey further up the list, weighing in at 59kg; Jerry is Jesse’s brother and Quaye’s youngest son.

By 7:30 all the boxers have weighed in, Rose has left and Charles Quartey, head coach of the Charles Quartey Boxing Foundation, has taken her place on the bench. The scales are put back in their box and the board lent against a wall before the little group of coaches huddle together over the notebook; it is time to make matches for the evening. In this chapter I trace how matchmaking highlights the tension between relatedness and boxers’ relationality as part of the boxing family, and consider how appropriate care between boxers is problematized when it intersects with brotherhood. My interlocutors’ understandings of relatedness, or ‘ways of acting out or conceptualizing relations between people’ (Carsten 1995: 224), are both embodied corporeally and require an attention to asymmetric relations of respect, care and subordination. As a result of their corporeal similarity brothers make conceptually suitable opponents, yet in practice bouts between brothers are highly problematic. This chapter explores why.

Care and Kinship – relatedness in practice

In the previous chapters I showed that boxers are relational subjects who emerge through care-work and an ethical orientation toward others. Effective care involves negotiating the ambivalence of violence as a relationship which allows recognition and mutual affirmation on the one hand (Das 1996; Livingstone 2012), and as destructive and objectifying on the other (Scarry 1985; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004). The boxing family as a moral community is constituted through a shared attention to practices of care, not through the capacity for physical violence or subordination. Ethical life in the gym and the ring demands an attention to boxers' immanence in one another's lives - the mutual nature of being a boxer. This chapter asks how ethical life oriented towards being-with in this way is problematized by another form of relational being, the relatedness (Carsten 2000) of kinship.

Boxers and coaches are embedded in communities, relationships and families beyond the sport, so to look only to the gym and the ring to understand their lived experience would be a mistake. For many, relatives offer a route into the sport and as a result the boxing community is criss-crossed with kinship relations. This chapter interrogates lived experience at the intersection of these different forms of relational being, and considers the tensions that emerge when relatives train together and box one another. Towards the end of the 20th century, anthropologists moved away from understanding kinship through abstract structures of affiliation and descent grounded in genealogical connection and instead focused on the lived experience of belonging and being related. 'Relatedness' emerged as a central concept in this New Kinship Studies movement, one which gave primacy to 'indigenous idioms of being related' and in doing so avoided the 'pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested' (Carsten 2000: 4). Relatedness thus came to be understood as a product of sharing and commensality (Carsten 2000, 1997; Weismantel 1995), common practice (Leach 2009) and place (Bamford 2004; Nave 2016) to name but a few ethnographic examples, and as a fundamentally dynamic and flexible process rather than being rigidly defined by birth (Clark 1999; Carsten 2000). Analysing boxers' experiences and idiomatic expressions of relatedness avoids the assumption that genealogical connections are ultimately pertinent to boxers' experience of being family. Tensions between different forms

of relational being are managed by the boxing family by re-shaping boxers' bodies over the course of their careers and lives.

I first discuss how matches are made, and explore how the common descriptor "level" accounts for boxers' relationality and specific relationships of hierarchy between boxers. I then outline how this relationality is problematized by kinship relations – most often those between brothers. Ethical life as a boxer and as a brother are significantly different, indeed the two are mutually exclusive. Boxers who are siblings are caught between contrasting ethics of care and responsibility and a hierarchy of obligation emerges in which ethical life between brothers supersedes ethical practices of mutuality between boxers. To address this problematic intersection boxers' weight is strategically managed, thereby undoing the substantive manifestation of siblings' relatedness *and* their relational proximity in the boxing family. Ethical life for boxers who are kin is maintained processually (Carsten 1997, 2000), but to do so the corporeal manifestation of relatedness is, paradoxically, actively undone.

Studies which explicitly foreground care and kinship in African contexts often consider care in the face of illness and disease. A body of literature has emerged in response to the AIDS/HIV epidemic of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Henderson 2012, 2013; Klaitz 2010; Dilger 2010) which explores how practices of care 'actively augment sociality compromised through HIV/AIDS' (Henderson 2012:9). Kinship (Klaitz 2010, 2009) and personhood (Henderson 2011, 2012) are re-made through practices of care, in the face of illnesses and diseases. As Henderson, Klaitz and others (cf. Reece 2015) note, illness and the practices of care which address it are folded into broader dimensions of social life. Following this point, this chapter explores how the repertoires of care which pervade the boxing family are similarly folded into lives beyond the sport. In concluding, I turn my ethnographic argument to address the anthropological discussion of substance and kinship. I build on Janet Carsten's work to destabilise the *a priori* assumption that the substance of kinship and the code of conduct between kin are separable registers of relatedness (Carsten 1995, 2004). In doing so, I contribute to a canon of literature which focuses on developing and emergent forms of kinship and destabilises the assumption that kinship represents genealogy (Carsten 2004; Edwards 2009; Rapp 1999; Weston 1997). Although care might be considered to forge and maintain kinship relations (Faubion 2001; Taylor 2008; Bourneman 2001) – what constitutes care is contextually dependent (as chapter one and two show), and therefore not all acts of care make kinship relations in the same way. In order to be brothers and boxers, the

corporeal manifestation of siblings' relatedness must be undone. Weight management and matchmaking, like the violence and pain of training and competition, thus account for boxers as relational subjects.

"Level", Similarity and Hierarchy

As outlined previously, boxing matches are made between boxers within certain weight ranges. However, making a match is not simply a matter of choosing two boxers of a similar weight. Matchmakers must have a keen understanding of boxers' ability, style, body shape, trajectory in the sport and the context of potential opponents' relations beyond the sport including kinship and other social relations. Good matchmaking demands an understanding of boxers as relational subjects both in and out of the ring, and calls for an assessment of the boxing match as a social interaction which is more nuanced than a competition to physically subordinate an opponent.

Unlike the professional and exhibition bouts I described in the previous chapter, in which opponents often have skill and role asymmetries, coaches described how amateur bouts were deliberately made to be evenly-matched. This is partly because of the difference in financial structure between amateur and professional boxing (see introduction). Given these differences, there is no space in the amateur sport for journeymen who make a living by losing like those discussed in the previous chapter.¹¹ The small percentage of amateur boxers who are paid (albeit sporadically) by the GABF (Ghana Amateur Boxing Federation) are retained for their competitive boxing skill, and to represent the nation at international competitions such as the Olympics or World Championship. Matches between amateur boxers are made to be as competitive as possible to both assess relative skill levels and to allow boxers to develop through competition. Whereas professional bouts are often deliberate mismatches, amateur bouts are generally made to be as even as possible or "50/50", as coaches described them.

The matches made at the Akotoku academy that morning followed this logic. Washington, at that time assistant Black Bombers coach, wanted "50/50" bouts in the Prison Canteen

¹¹ However, boxers with losing or mixed records do continue to box as amateurs for pleasure, pride and many other reasons.

fights because of the upcoming schedule of international competitions for the Black Bombers. He explained that the Black Bombers would benefit from competitive bouts:

‘They [The Black Bombers] need to have some fights so that they can compete, so that they can get better for the Games [Olympics]. It’s part of their training. That’s why now it is important that the prison canteen comes on [happens].’

During the previous year, there had been a lull in organised amateur bouts and the Prison Canteen fight-nights had only happened a few times, meaning few of the amateur boxers at the Attoh Quarshie had fought more than three times during the year. This was put down to infighting in the GABF, and more widely to the perennial complaint of under-funding by the Ministry of Sport. Washington’s emphasis on the importance of the Prison Canteen “coming on” casts the competition between amateurs in terms of mutual gain. The bouts are pedagogic, an opportunity for boxers to improve as they box against one another, and competition is again a moment of mutual benefit.

Coaches described how making “50/50” matches required a detailed knowledge of boxers’ “level”, a term widely used to describe relative skill and experience in the sport. “Level” is a relational concept; to assess an individual’s “level” alone would be nonsensical, rather, “level” at the very least implies relativity and is often explicitly relative. “Level” also articulates hierarchy alongside similarity and difference, and in training boxers are constantly taught the importance of understanding and recognising “level” among their peers. Boxers were often told to perform tasks “according to level”. For example, when novices brought cases of soft-drinks as part of their gym-joining-fee, boxers were told to “take one drink by level, come forward by level”. This is a largely self-governing and non-verbal process whereby the most senior boxers moved forward first and the less senior boxers waited until the end. There is no absolutely set-order and the exact order depends on who is in the gym at the time, however there are predictable patterns. These included all of the professional boxers going before any of the amateur boxers, followed by the amateur boxers who have been selected for the national team, followed by those with either considerable experience in terms of years in the gym (which does not equate to skill, but does demand respect) and then those who are boxing regularly. Then came those who had had more than one bout outside the gym, followed by those who had not boxed outside the gym, followed by novices

who were allowed to train on the gym floor, followed finally by novices still in “standing”.¹² The coaches watch this process carefully and should any boxer come forward at an inappropriate time they are asked to justify why they have stepped forward, told why somebody else present should go before them in relation to the above criteria and chided for their mistake.

An active understanding of “level” was employed almost continually in the gym to reflect the correct relations of respect and the effective practice of care between boxers. Considerations of “level” inform the flow and intensity of physicality between boxers as described in the previous chapters. An episode in sparring between Emmanuel Martey and an amateur called Issah shows how understandings of “level” shape understandings of effective care in the ring. Issah is a light-heavyweight amateur boxer who began boxing in January 2014 and is aged 31, older than most amateurs. Issah is tall, muscular and is considered to have potential but not to be technically proficient yet. By contrast Emmanuel Martey is a professional boxer who has boxed for a decade. He is a former “Black Bomber” and is widely considered to be highly skilled. Physically he is shorter than Issah, at around 5'11", and visibly not as muscular. Emmanuel is understood to be of a significantly higher “level” than Issah.

During the second round of sparring Emmanuel (the more experienced boxer) knocked-down Issah with a right hook before the session was abruptly called to a halt. Prior to the knockdown, the coaches had repeatedly told Issah to calm down and not hit Emmanuel so hard. The following Saturday morning Emmanuel visited me and explained what had happened as we sat together in the shade outside my room. It was not the first time the two had sparred and after previous sparring session Issah had been vocally proud of working with an experienced professional. Emmanuel explained that Issah had been ‘going *gidigidi* [high intensity] – always trying to knock me [out] with his punches, Throwing only power.’

As he spoke, Emmanuel performed a pastiche of Issah’s physical movements - squaring his shoulders and whirling his arms in stiff, awkward hooks - his movements referencing Issah’s unrefined technique. Emmanuel broke character and a smile flashed across his face as he described how he defended Issah’s blows throughout the first round, again miming his own

¹² “Standing” is the first stage of training as a novice. A novice “stands” in the club room during training sessions perfecting the stance and movements of punches without moving around. “Standing” is not partner-orientated, but rather is about embodying technical articulations of the boxers’ limbs.

technical and polished defence. Washington had told Issah that he should be sparring rather than trying to knock Emmanuel out, and Emmanuel explained that:

‘Issah cannot fit me [he is not as good as me], he is not my level, but still he is trying to knock me [out] even after Washy has said [not to]. I am his senior, he has to respect.’

During the second round Issah continued to try to punch hard and with little technique. Emmanuel was frustrated by this lack of respect and decided to throw “effective punches” because ‘his [Issah’s] sparring was not correct’. He mimed slipping three punches neatly before throwing two straight punches and a right hook, emphasising this crucial moment with a slow-mo mime. He then squared his stance, dropped his hands (becoming Issah again) and mimed the punches hitting his face, snapping his head from side to side accompanied by the sounds “PAAA! PAAA! PAAA!” as the shots “landed”. Finally, he wobbled his knees, comically stumbled from left to right and dramatically toppled over backwards. He had knocked Issah down.

After a moment’s pause for dramatic effect Emmanuel jumped up, all smiles at his parody. He explained that what had happened was “right” because Issah was not showing respect to either him or Washington. To back up his own account, he told me that that afterwards he had spoken with Joshua Clottey (the most experienced professional at the gym) and George Ashie (a similarly experienced professional), and both had told him that what he did was right. Issah’s failure to effectively recognise this disparity in “level” between himself and Emmanuel, and with it the appropriate physicality of sparring, led to his unethical practice in the ring. He failed to relate to Emmanuel in the normatively appropriate way – in this case to work on his technique rather than trying to knock out a technically more skilled boxer - and as a result Emmanuel was justified in physically subordinating him to re-establish the hierarchy between the two. Although Emmanuel’s actions were understood as dangerous and detrimental and the sparring was stopped as soon as Issah was knocked down, Emmanuel’s actions were also justified as appropriate in light of Issah’s behaviour and the boxers’ relative “level”. Reflecting later on the episode, several other boxers watching the sparring noted that:

‘He [Issah] is not Emmanuel’s level, so he can’t just be trying to knock him like that. So Martega [Emmanuel] had to show him by knocking him [out].’

'Level' addresses boxers' relative skill, experience and weight, and in doing so expresses normative hierarchy between boxers. An understanding of relative "level" thus shapes what constitutes appropriate care and ethical behaviour between the ropes and in the gym. As a concept which demonstrates boxers relationality and establishes hierarchy and ethical behaviour, "level" does similar conceptual work to siblingship.

Kinship in the Boxing Family

Back in the Akotoku Academy the programme for the evening's bouts had begun to take shape. With only a few unmatched names left on the weigh-in sheet Theophilus said "what about Jerry and Jesse?". There followed a long and heated discussion of whether Jerry and Jesse – brothers, and sons of coach Quaye, should box one another that evening.

As mentioned previously kinship relations are widespread among the Accra boxing family, the majority between male relatives (in part because the majority of boxers are men). Many of my interlocutors described how they began boxing by "following" their father, an uncle, senior cousin or brother to the gym. Like other gyms, the Attah Quarshie often left time for "junior boxers", children aged seven to fourteen, to train after senior boxers had finished. Children who had been watching training would be given a short, loosely structured training session involving some technique, some punching and occasionally sparring. At the Attah Quarshie children could train with senior boxers from age fifteen, although their participation in training was always carefully monitored. I was not aware of any sisters, nieces or daughters who trained at the Attah Quarshie, but several boxers and coaches had begun training their daughters at home and explained that they would bring them to the gym when they were older. All coaches I knew of were vocally supportive of women boxing.

Often coaches encouraged their sons and daughters into the sport from a young age. Jerry and Jesse, for example, had been encouraged to box by Quaye, himself a former amateur boxer. Quaye explained that he was not committed enough to turn professional as he preferred disco dancing as a young man, but began coaching after his sons were born with the intention of training them. Kinship relations provide a key route into boxing in Ga Mashie; both practically as relatives literally accompany and encourage children to the gym, and aspirationally as relatives are looked-up-to *because* of their involvement in the sport. Sibling

and cousin relations are most prevalent between active boxers. Although I knew sons/fathers and nephews/uncles who boxed actively they were often at the opposite ends of “careers” in the sport – fathers and uncles nearing the end of careers, while sons and nephews were often relative novices. Inter-generational training between boxers occurred very rarely and I never witnessed inter-generational competition between kin. Inter-generational relationships tended to take the form of coach-boxer or manager-boxer, while sibling-and-cousin relations were much more common in training.

Others have noted that sibling relations in Ghana are often hierarchical with regard to relative age, particularly those between same-sex siblings (van der Geest 2013; Kaye 1962). Younger siblings are often expected to be deferential and respectful towards elder same-sex siblings, who in turn are expected to provide and share material resources such as money and food with their younger siblings (van der Geest 2013: 60-61). Although Ga Mashie is a diverse place, respect is normatively due from younger brothers to older brothers. Demonstrating respect in such relations involves formal greetings and grammar structures recognising seniority, and deference to a senior sibling’s authority rather than contesting an older sibling’s decisions. Likewise, elder siblings are expected to shoulder some responsibility for the wellbeing of younger siblings, often being heavily involved in childcare from a young age and later in life maintaining some responsibility for housing younger siblings and supporting them financially (van der Geest 2013). In this sense sibling relations reflect Michael Lambek’s (2011) understanding of kinship as inherently ethical. Brotherhood demands ‘a set of commitments, played out in practice and publicly articulated’ (2011: 3), commitments to behave respectfully and deferentially on the part of the junior and to provide material resources to the younger siblings on the part of the elder. Like the concept of “level” among the boxing family, siblingship articulates relationships of hierarchy, care and dependence, and demands ethical behaviour which reflects normative hierarchies. I turn now to consider how relatedness is understood not only as an ethical practice, but also as a corporeal quality in Ga Mashie.

Weight, “Level” and the Substance of Relatedness

In Ga Mashie brothers are understood to have similar bodies. Washington described how:

‘Jesse and Jerry are brothers, so they are going to be similar because they are from the same material. They are one father, one mother. Jessie is Lightweight (61kg), he is the senior. Jerry is junior, and right now he has been boxing at featherweight (56 kg), but he is still getting bigger, so now he is coming to lightweight the same as Jessie.’

He went on to list a number of boxing brothers who are similar weights, and described how brothers also tend to have similar body shapes, or “the same design” as Theophilus put it – tall and thin in the case of Jerry and Jesse. Descent manifests in corporeal shape and weight; siblings’ relatedness is thus understood as a material and substantive property. For boxers to constitute one another in the relational forms I outlined in the previous chapters, particularly as opponents, they must be of a comparable weight. Habib and Emmanuel, for example, emerge as mutual subjects because they are both super-middleweight (76.5kg) and of a similar “level”. The parallel here between the relatedness of siblingship and boxers’ relationality is clear; brothers inevitably have materially similar bodies, while boxers who are competitors or suitable sparring partners too must have materially similar bodies. The weight of the body indexes both siblingship and the capacity to be a competitor (and as such to constitute the other relationally as a boxer).

In this narrow sense brothers make obvious matches. Indeed, it was this along with their relatively even “level” which prompted the initial suggestion of a bout between Jerry and Jesse. In this sense “level” as a relative concept does similar work to brotherhood as an expression of relatedness; both terms refer to relational subjects, articulate corporeal similarity, denote hierarchy and demand specific standards of ethical behaviour towards others. As the discussion between the coaches proceeded it became clear that the similarity between siblingship and “level” as ways of articulating subjectivity was problematic in light of the different ethical standards of care, respect and recognition between siblings and boxers.

Theophilus suggested that Jerry and Jesse would make a good match as, it was generally agreed, they were of a similar “level” and comparable weight.¹³ What followed this

¹³ Although bouts were nominally at a specific weight class during the prison canteen bouts, coaches were flexible in selecting boxers of different weights to box at the Prison Canteen. It was possible for boxers to be match with those in weight classes either side of theirs, i.e. a middle weight boxer

suggestion, however, highlights how parity in skill and weight were not the only factors in making a suitable match. Charles supported the idea, arguing that as they were boxers they should be boxing irrespective of their relatedness. By contrast Washington was more sceptical and pointed to their relatedness as affecting both the potential action and ethics of the bout. Quaye was curiously quiet during the discussion, perhaps reflecting his ambivalence as the national coach at the time and also the father of the boxers. Eventually the three agreed that the match was a bad idea and it was scratched from the ledger. Washington had argued that a bout between the two would go one of two ways – that the brothers would refuse to box, or that they would box with unethical and potentially dangerous consequences. I explore these two lines of logic below, and use them to illuminate the problematic intersection of fraternal relatedness and relational care within the boxing family.

‘Blood is thicker than water’: Disrupting Sibling Relations

Washington first suggested that because the two are brothers they will not compete effectively. After some discussion Theophilus and Charles agreed that the brothers would probably do “combat school” rather than box competitively.¹⁴ Competitive boxing was the desired outcome of the prison canteen bouts, but Jerry and Jesse’s relatedness – their being siblings - was cited as the reason that they would likely not compete effectively, and in doing so not mutually benefit from the bout as the coaches wanted them to.

As Washington and I walked back towards his house after the matches had been made, he explained that:

(75kgs) might be matched with a welterweight (69kg) or a light heavy weight (81kg), if the coaches considered this appropriate; an assessment based more on skill than size.

¹⁴ “Combat school” is a low intensity training exercise, focusing on mutual support, cooperation and assistance. Actions are orientated towards the other boxer developing their technique in timing and defence, without putting them at risk of being hurt or injured by punching “effectively” (read: hard). Competitive boxing is a different relation of physicality in the ring. See chpt. 2 for a discussion of mutuality through competition, chpt. 1 for a discussion of combat school.

‘It’s not good for two brothers to fight. If two brothers are together in a competition, then the one who is better has to go through. The other one should withdraw and give him a bye, so that the better one goes through.’

Ethical action between brothers matched together is to withdraw from a bout rather than contest it. After this episode I interviewed a number of boxers about their fraternal relationships in the sport. David, a highly successful professional whose brother was also a professional boxer, explained that the attrition of boxing competitively is problematic for brothers:

Leo: ‘Can brothers ever compete with each other?’

David: ‘There is no way you are ever going to compete with your brother.’

L: ‘Why is that?’

D: ‘Because that makes you understand how tough boxing is. Boxing is not a joke, boxing is not artificial. Everything you see in there is real. The punches, the injuries...You are automatically guaranteed that you are going to get cuts when you sign the contract...you’re going to get a swollen face; you’re going to feel body pains. Automatic guarantee!’

[David pauses for some seconds]

‘So why are you going to compete with your brother? Brother to brother. If you are a champion, why are you going to fight with your brother? Are you going to hurt your brother? Blood is thicker than water.’

L: ‘OK, so ... it’s not good to hurt your brother, or to want to hurt your brother?’

D: ‘Yeah, you shouldn’t. If you beat up your brother...you haven’t done nothing. When you are enjoying your life while your brother is dying in the hospital, it’s not good. That’s why brothers never fight. That’s why we will never fight [David and his brother Isaac].’

The attrition and violence of competition is ethically problematic for brothers. Between non-siblings the attrition of competitive boxing can constitute a form of caregiving and mutual-

becoming which benefits opponents. For example, Habib and Emmanuel emerge as subjects through their capacity and potential to engage in competition with one another – as opponents they mutually constitute the subject position of the other (see chpt. 2). However, as David explains, to enjoy success at the expense of your brother's health and to deliberately damage one's brother in pursuit of success yourself, is unacceptable. The success and happiness of one brother here depends on the well-being of the other, the physical care and mutual-becoming of a competitive bout is ethically inappropriate because of brothers' perceived immanence in one another. Jerry and Jesse *cannot* constitute one another as opponents *because* they are brothers. Understanding this incompatibility requires an understanding of competition as a process of mutual becoming, rather than subordination – by competing together, the other as a “competitor” is realised and brought into being but the same does not apply between brothers. To compete with one's brother is to achieve “nothing” in David's words.

David's words reflect the different ethical relationships between competitors and siblings. The normative hierarchy between brothers contradicts the practice of competition in the ring. For a younger brother to try to physically subordinate an older sibling as competitive boxing demands (even if this effort might otherwise be understood as mutually beneficial) inverts a normative relationship of deference and hierarchy between an elder and a junior brother. Likewise, an older brother is normatively expected to physically and materially care for a younger brother, so the attrition of competition, and the corresponding injury and corporeal damage between boxers, also inverts a normative ethical relationship. The logic of attrition as beneficial and caring in competition contradicts the asymmetry and ethics of sibling relations.

Brothers may choose not to compete either by “doing combat school” (as the coaches suspected Jessie and Jerry would), or by withdrawing from the fight completely. To do so would maintain an ethical fraternal relationship by respecting the normative hierarchy between brothers, but would undermine the relational ethics of competitive boxing. Theophilus, Charles and Washington agreed that for the brothers to do combat school rather than compete would be worse than not matching the pair, as it would undermine the purpose of the Prison Canteen fights and in doing so also undermine the legitimacy and authority of the coaches themselves.

'We quarrel': Proximity as Danger

Washington then suggested that if the two *did* compete, they would likely injure or hurt (*pila*) one another. He argued that Jerry (the older) may “beat him [Jesse] too much”. Washington’s words seem to refer to a heightened violence between siblings, seemingly a direct contradiction of his initial statement of violence between siblings as unethical. This second point draws attention to the difference between normative forms of respect and deference between siblings, and the reality of tension, competition and danger in sibling relations. In his classical account of Asante kinship Meyer Fortes suggests that despite idealised forms and accounts of kinship promoting hierarchy, deference and harmony between siblings, “Behind these rules and restrictions lies the assumption that siblings as autonomous persons are rivals beneath the surface of their amity” (Fortes 1969: 176). Whatever ideal form sibling relations take in theory, and however harmonious relationships between siblings *should* be, there remains an understanding that the closeness of siblings is also a source of tension and danger. By noting this disjuncture between ideal forms and the lived experience of being siblings, Fortes’ discussion seems to diverge from the abstraction of early-20th century kinship studies and hint at an experiential account of relatedness. Similar dynamics of mutuality and tension between siblings elsewhere (van de Geest 2013) and the ‘dark side of kinship’ as source of tension, danger and violence has been noted elsewhere in the anthropology of West Africa (Gechiere 2003). These dynamics came to light as David went on to speak about training with his brother as a child and teenager.

David (D): ‘I have 2 brothers, one is a boxer, one is not...We started training together, I looked up to him. I followed him [my brother] to the gym, I followed him to jogging, so I became a boxer. He’s my senior brother.’

Leo (L): ‘Did you ever box each other?’

D: ‘We used to spar. That was a long time ago. But anytime we finish sparring it becomes like...[pause]...a fight.’

L: ‘Why is that?’

D: 'Because you know, boxing is boxing. Is different what you call boxing. It is different when you put the gloves on your hands. It changes you.'

L: 'How does it change you?'

D: 'It changes your mentality. It makes you understand that... the other guy over there is coming to hurt you, so you have to defend yourself and hurt him. If you don't do that, you are going to get hurt. So any time we spar, we quarrel, we quarrel, we quarrel. So it is just better that we stop sparring.'

David's point of entry into the boxing family is, like many others, through a male relative – his brother. As the two became more embedded in the boxing family, their fraternal relationship intersected with and problematized their work as boxers. His words highlight that entering the boxing family involves a shift in ethical understandings of care and mutuality, 'it changes your mentality'. Boxing demands a reframing of the pain, physicality and violence of the sport as potential care and recognition, rather than only as subordination and objectification. He went on to describe how:

'Sparring has to be tough. It makes you condition to a fight. It makes you understand what you are going to do in the coming month. So the fact that he is the senior brother, if today I beat him, he will not agree. We start quarrelling, he gets angry. If he beats me, the same thing.'

Here, David demonstrates how the ethical inflection of the violence of sparring as caregiving and mutual becoming (chapter 1) is incompatible with ethical life as siblings. However, rather than "do combat school" or refuse to spar, violence between siblings is heightened and accentuated rather than avoided. Inverting or contravening hierarchical relations of respect and deference, if not carefully avoided, can bring the tension between siblings to the surface in a moment of extreme violence.

Although David's words refer to an incident in sparring, a similar logic of heightened violence between siblings applies to competitive boxing. Some weeks after the matchmaking session, a Black Bomber named Musah boxed against a man called Joshua at the prison canteen. As we watched, Osman exclaimed

"Ehhh...Awoodade [Musah's nickname] jile kpakpa. Ame no gidigidi."

Musha is beating him hard, they are fight fast and hard.

A week later I walked across town with Joshua and asked him about the fight, noting that several people had spoken to me separately about its intensity. Joshua replied:

J: 'Yeah, it was tough. We are cousins, Musah and me, our Fathers are brothers. So it's that way when you fight with your relative, you really want to beat them harder.'

L: 'Why is that?'

J: 'It's because you are so close to that person and you know that person so well, you always want to show that you are better. You really want to beat them hard. When I am boxing with him [Musah] it is always very hard.'

L: 'But is it ok to beat your cousin like that?'

J: 'It's not so good to beat them, so you have to try not to.'

L: 'Is it different between brothers and cousins?'

J: 'It's similar...If brothers fight it will be very hard, more than cousins because they are closer.'

Joshua's relatedness to Musah is understood to heighten the violence of their bout. Violence between male kin is therefore not only normatively unethical and in this sense socially dangerous, but will likely be more intense and physically damaging if it does occur. Joshua extends this logic to brothers, explaining that their "closer" kinship relation exacerbates the intensity of violence between them. Sibling relations are both dangerous and affirmative because they are central to ethical life and personhood, and as such are a site of potential rupture and breakdown (Geschiere 1997, 2003). Discourses of bewitchment within kinship relations are an 'effort to maintain relations despite their threat' (Geschiere 1997: 212) in the face of the frightening realisation that it is those most intimate who are potentially most dangerous. The accounts presented above reflect a similar understanding of intimacy as necessary and constitutive but also dangerous. Although fraternal violence is recognised as unethical it remains understandable; Washington, David and Joshua's words demonstrate a logic to fraternal violence despite its abhorrence, a logic grounded not in moral ideals and

normative sibling relations, but in the lived experience of being brothers. In light of Washington's double-edged argument Jerry and Jesse's match was eventually scrapped.

Both the relatedness of siblingship and the relationality of subjects in the boxing family demand an understanding of asymmetry and hierarchy. In the boxing family understandings of relative "level" recognise asymmetry and articulate legitimate physical care in the ring. However, the attrition and physicality of boxing contradicts relationship of respect and deference between siblings and potentially reveals pre-existent underlying sibling tensions (Fortes 1969: 176, van der Geest 2013). This is most apparent and problematic in cases like that of Jesse and Jerry whose materially similar bodies and similar "level" make them conceptually suitable "competitors", while as siblings they maintain an asymmetric and hierarchical relationship. Effective care through competition between "opponents" whose "level" is equivalent is juxtaposed against the asymmetric and hierarchical relationship of care, deference and respect between siblings. Their siblingship also carries the darker connotation of intense competition and rivalry which, given the opportunity, might crystallise as intense violence in the ring. What emerges is a clear hierarchy between the ethics of fraternal relatedness, and the other-oriented ethics of relationality between subjects in the boxing family. In David's words:

'Blood is thicker than water.'

Although the ethical practice of brotherhood supersedes the ethical practice of boxing, brothers are not forced to quit the sport. Indeed, the prevalence of kinship relations, and particularly sibling relations, in the boxing family show that this is far from being the case. Rather, the boxing family work at the malleable intersection of boxing and relatedness – the boxer's body-weight – to navigate this tension.

Making Weight, Making Siblings

The week after the debate about matching Jesse and Jerry I spoke with Washington about the prolific number of brothers boxing in Ga Mashie. I listed several brothers currently at the Attoh Quarshie and the cited Joshua, Emmanuel and Judas Clottey as possibly the most famous brothers in the boxing family. All three have had successful professional boxing

careers, Joshua is a former world champion and Judas and Emmanuel were commonwealth and regional title holders respectively. I asked why the three had never fought one another, considering that they were active as professional boxers concurrently, all of a similar “level” and in similar weight categories. Washington replied by telling me that Joshua and Emmanuel are full brothers, stressing that they have the same mother and father, whereas Judas is somewhat older and Washington was unsure of exactly how they were related; whether he was a cousin or half-brother. Joshua had previously told me that he began boxing when:

‘I followed my brother to training. He was boxing and I looked up to him, so I followed him and I started boxing’

Again a male relative provided an avenue into the sport. Washington described how when Emmanuel (the older) and Joshua (the younger) were learning to box, Emmanuel was always heavier than Joshua so they did not compete. However, as they got older it became clear that they would eventually be in the same weight category and become possible “opponents”. Washington explained:

‘Because they are brothers they have the same design, the same body. So they would come to the same weight, around welter or light-welter.’

As a result, Joshua “jumped up” two weight classes from lightweight (61kg) to full welterweight (66.5kg) rather than boxing at the intermediary light-welterweight category (63.5kg) where his brother competed. Joshua and Emmanuel’s material relatedness - their corporeal similarity in weight - was undone in order that the two could maintain an ethical relationship as brothers.

To jump up two weight categories is relatively unusual and considered dangerous. The changes in physiognomy that such a big, deliberate change requires are understood to affect a boxers’ ability to compete effectively and safely. This change is often described in terms of whether a boxer will be “strong enough” at the higher weight, whether they will withstand the more powerful punches of higher weight class and whether they will maintain their speed and coordination despite gaining weight. As a serious risk, yet one which is preferable to possibly having to box one’s brother, this jump reflects the gravity of the problem posed to the boxing family by fraternal relationships.

Washington explained that managing weight in order to avoid boxing one's brother is widespread. He cited another example of twin brothers who 'have the same design', but who box at flyweight (52kg) and bantamweight (56kg). He explained that Jessie and Jerry would need to manage their relative weight over the coming years. As Jessie gets older, he should move up to light welterweight (64kg), at which point Jerry could increase his competitive weight to lightweight (61kg). Managing weight relative to one's siblings is a processual way of avoiding problematic encounters in the ring or the gym. By managing weight normative ethical relations of hierarchy and care between brothers can be maintained, and any chance for underlying tensions to appear are avoided and subverted. Relatedness as an ethical project (Lambek 2011) is achieved processually (Carsten 2000) by undoing the material manifestation of relatedness – siblings' similar body weight. This process is ongoing throughout siblings' competitive careers as diet and exercises are continually shaped in relation to the other's body.

Managing weight is an ongoing process which requires careful attention, and is a responsibility shared between boxer and coach. Coaches weigh boxers regularly, every week or two if they do not have a bout coming up, and several times a day if they have an immanent bout. They advise on desired weights and strategize with boxers to avoid problematic bouts between brothers. Boxers, for their part, must implement strategies as they manage their weight over the course of their career, a period which might last decades. Weight is gained, lost and maintained through a combination of eating, drinking and exercising. Although boxers could lose large amounts of weight rapidly – I have witnessed boxers lose 5kgs in a single day, often immediately prior to a weigh-in – weight management between brothers was considered to be a longer-term process. Food intake was deliberately reduced or increased, and "road work" (running outside of official training in the gym), similarly increased or reduced in order to maintain the desired weight over a longer period of time. In this sense, the quotidian and everyday practices of eating, drinking and road work become part of ethical life for boxers whose siblings also box. The substantive, material body becomes the axis through which the tension between these different forms of relationality – the relatedness of brotherhood and the relationality of boxers - is negotiated.

(un)Doing Kinship

To summarise my ethnographic argument; a suitable match is one between boxers who can constitute one another relationally in the ring in the appropriate way. Weight is a key factor in this suitability. Brothers, by virtue of their relatedness, are likely to be of a similar weight and as such are conceptually suitable opponents. However, brothers are unsuitable opponents because the ethical practice of relatedness as a brother is significantly different to the ethical practice of relationality between boxers in the ring. Siblingship implies a hierarchy of deference and respect; a younger sibling is normatively deferent to an older sibling, and an older sibling is expected to provide materially for a younger sibling. By contrast, the ethic of co-constitution between boxers during a bout or in sparring is one of violence, pain and competition.

The substance of relatedness between brothers and the substance which permits relationality between boxers is the same - body weight. The problem of brothers boxing is overcome by systematically undoing brothers' substantive relatedness, and with it the potential for those brothers to be opponents. Siblingship here is neither given nor constant but requires continual work to maintain. Furthermore, there is a clear hierarchy between these two forms of relationality; relationality as boxers is subordinate to relatedness as a brother.

The tension between the relationality of boxers and the relatedness of brothers complicates a distinction between the natural and the social aspects of kinship. Here I turn to anthropological discussions of substance and the materiality of kinship and build on Janet Carsten's critique of David Schneider's analytic separation of the substance and code of kinship (1980). Substance is the idea of a material heredity which reflects the 'biogenetic substance' shared between kin. For Schneider, "blood" is the symbolic way of rendering this relatedness (1980: 24). Code refers to the 'kind of relationship or code for conduct which persons who share that substance, blood, are supposed to have' (1980: 91 cited in Carsten 2004: 114). Schneider aligns this distinction with the opposition between nature on the one hand and law on the other, which in turn constitute the two major orders of American culture (1980: 29). Carsten questions this 'seemingly unproblematic distinction between the order of nature and the order of law, and between natural substance and code for conduct' (2004:

114), and the concomitant assertion that code and substance are separate registers of relatedness.

Building on work which highlighted the malleable nature of relatedness (Strathern 1992; Weston 1997), Carsten argues that relatedness by “blood” is not only a hereditary asset but can be processual and created through acts of commensality, sharing and practice (1995: 224). Blood relations and the substance of relatedness are therefore constantly in the process of being made and remade, and not to partake in processes which are understood to create this substance amounts to a dangerous act of un-relating oneself. Maintaining substantive relatedness is thus an ethical act of being related, demonstrating that code and substance are not inherently separable or distinct (Carsten 1995). The ethnography I have presented in this chapter similarly problematizes the *a priori* distinction between substance and code, but inverts Carsten’s proposition about the processual nature of the substance of relatedness.

In Ga Mashie there is a pre-evident material similarity between brothers – that they are ‘the same material’, ‘the same design’ and therefore likely to be the same weight makes siblings potentially suitable opponents. However, the physicality and competition required to mutually constitute one another as opponents in the ring contradicts the appropriate relationship of respect and deference which characterises brotherhood. In Schneider’s terms these norms of ethical conduct might be considered the ‘code’ of sibling relations. In order to respect the ‘code’ of fraternal relatedness brothers’ body-weight, the material manifestation of their relatedness, is systematically altered. Substance and code here are not distinct, as Schneider posits, but inextricable.

Here I develop Carsten’s critique by proposing the idea of (un)doing relatedness. In Carsten’s work (1995), relatedness requires the processual creation of the substance of kinship (blood) through consuming food cooked in the family hearth. The substance of kinship is *made* in order to maintain kinship relations. The ethical practice of relatedness between brothers who both box does not require the processual *creation* of the substance of relatedness, but demands the processual un-doing of brothers’ substantive relatedness. At the intersection of boxers’ relationality and brothers’ relatedness, substantive relatedness is systematically undone in order to effectively be both a boxer and a brother. Although they are clearly intertwined and inextricable, substance and code here have an inverse relationship. By

varying their weight strategically boxers become less like siblings in one respect in order to maintain their sibling relationship in another. By attending to the substance and code of siblingship as inextricable, brothers can be boxers in Ga Mashie and boxers can *also* be good brothers. Constituting kinship can mean, in some respects, actively un-doing relatedness. (Un)doing kinship in this way challenges both the idea that the substance of kinship is static, stable or a pre-given, and the more recent assertion that the substance of kinship is necessarily *made* in order to maintain processual relatedness.

Amity, Relatedness and Relationality

Towards the end of chapter two I called on Giorgio Agamben's (2009) account of friendship to reflect on the ways that boxers understand their lives as mutually constitutive and intertwined. I also drew on Sahlins' 'mutuality of being' to address this intertwining. In this chapter I have shown how the intertwining of boxers' lives is contrasted against the intertwinings of family life, particularly those between brothers. This contrast is important because it poses a question which New Kinship Studies, despite its obvious merits, struggles to address: what makes kinship different from other forms of relationality (Dechau 2008:239)? In her introduction to *Cultures of Relatedness*, Carsten anticipates this problem when she notes that:

'The obvious problem with relatedness is that either it is used in a restricted sense to convey relations in some way founded on genealogical connection, in which case it is open to similar problems as kinship, or it is used in a more general sense to encompass other kinds of social relations, in which case it becomes so broad that it is in danger of 'becoming analytically vacuous' (Holy 1996: 168).' (Carsten 2000: 5).

It is this question - what makes kinship *different* rather than how relatedness is experienced and lived - which Sahlins' tackles (2013), although, as others have noted, the 'mutuality-of-being' which he offers in response is similarly limited by its vagueness (Shryock 2013: 278). When they argue over whether Jerry and Jesse should box, Washington, Theophilus, Charles and Quaye are similarly deconstructing the difference between kinship and another form of relationality. As such my ethnography is poised at useful juncture to address this question.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to suggest what kinship is (or is not), I would like to propose a different way of approaching the question. In essence it might be useful to think about what makes kinship similar to other forms of social relations, rather than beginning with the assumption that kinship differs and then asking how it does so. To explain why, I turn to Julian Pitt-Rivers' essay on Meyer Fortes' concept of 'amity' as the defining feature of kinship relations (1973).

For Fortes (1969) 'amity' describes the 'axiom of prescriptive altruism' (Fortes 1969: 251) which Pitt-Rivers understands as 'the moral obligation...to forego self-interest in favour of another, to sacrifice oneself *for the sake* of someone else.' (1973: 90). This altruism is 'inflexible, involuntary, immutable [and] established by birth' for kin, reflecting a classic genealogical account of kinship. Noting that amity derives from the French for friend, Pitt-Rivers argues that a similar principle also applies to friendship relations although remains voluntary between friends. Pitt Rivers uses amity to suggest that friendship and kinship as ways of relating-to and being-with others overlap considerably rather than being evidently distinct. If we take on board arguments emerging from New Kinship Studies that relatedness is not guaranteed by birth and does not necessarily reflect genealogy (Weston 1997; Strathern 1992; Rapp 1999; Carsten 2000), then little comes to separate kinship and friendship and, as Carsten suggests, "relatedness" struggles to distinguish kinship from other social relations (Carsten 2000: 5).

Of course, the ethnographic record shows that although understandings of relatedness vary and are flexible in their social construction, concepts similar to family or kinship exist widely in our interlocutors' experiences. This suggests that there *is* something different about kinship as a way of relating to others. Rather than attempt to neatly define this difference, I suggest that to address what this difference might be anthropologists might look more for similarity than difference. Rather than assuming that relatedness is analytically different to other forms of relationality, we might consider how our interlocutors traverse and construct distinction and similarity between relatedness and other forms of relationality, as the coaches do when they pick apart Jerry and Jesse's siblingship and proximity as competitors.

In this chapter I have suggested that siblingship and being a boxer are remarkably similar yet incompatible ways of relating-to and being-with others. Considerable work goes into parsing apart these forms of relationality where they intersect and in maintaining them

simultaneously, rather than there being a clear *a priori* difference. As coaches and boxers deconstruct the similarities between the two forms, the salient differences emerge and are confronted through weight management and careful matchmaking. Anthropologists interested in what distinguishes kinship and relatedness as forms of relationality might learn from this approach, and look first for similarity rather than difference.

Conclusion

Boxers and coaches have lives outside the sport which entail relationships and responsibilities not predicated on the other-orientated ethic of care of the gym and the ring. They are fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, some are daughters and although I knew no mothers I am sure there are and have been many. Kinship relations intersect with and shape boxers' and coaches' work in the sport. Similarly, kinship relations are shaped by work in the gym, the ring and by the banal suffering of making and maintaining weight. Siblingship as a processual and ethical project is achieved through meals skipped, extra food eaten, miles run and sweat lost while mouths thirst.

This chapter has moved beyond the gym and the ring – the spaces which characterised the first and second chapters of this thesis respectively. By outlining how the boxing family work to reconcile contrasting forms of relationality, I have turned their labour and creativity to address the anthropological concept of kinship and argued that being related as a boxer paradoxically involves un-doing the self-evident materiality of relatedness. This chapter supports the project begun by Schneider (1980) and furthered by Carsten (1995, 2004) and others (cf. Edwards 2008; Edwards and Salazar 2009) of complicating the analytic distinction between the “biological” and the “social” previously inherent to anthropological studies of kinship.

The boxing family are embedded in social networks and relations other than those of kinship. They are friends, employees, bosses and entrepreneurs; a carpenter, a wholesaler, a slaughter-man, a market trader. Some are icons, others are infamous. It is this embeddedness which I address in the coming chapters. Up to this point my named interlocutors have almost all been men, and the kinship relations addressed in this chapter are explicitly those between men. It is true that the boxing family is predominantly male, and

boxing itself associated with masculinity in Accra. The next chapter takes a critical approach to this gendering, and explores how boxing informs and relates to boxers' gendered experience. I consider how masculinities are lived through work in and outside of the gym, through family life and in relation to globally prevalent and locally specific tropes of gendered identity. In doing so, I continue to shift my analytic focus outward from the gym and the ring.

In chapter four I trace the lives of three boxers as they struggle to author themselves as masculine subjects in a world where gendered aspirations are characterised not by completion but by compromise. These men are fathers, sons, partners, socialites, traders, benefactors, journeymen, prospects and unpaid amateurs. In each of these roles they articulate themselves as men in different ways. However, their articulations reference their lives and aspirations on the periphery of a global industry which promises great rewards, but so often fails to deliver.

Part II

4

Becoming The Best Ever

Gender and Agency in a Global Industry

Few practices have been so widely understood to espouse masculinity as ‘the manly art’ of boxing (Oates 1987; cf. Wacquant 2004: 37-38). Building on feminist scholarship, since the 1980s social scientists have analysed gender as a contextually dependent social construct, rather than as a pre-given attribute of the body (Halberstam 1998; Butler 1990). Whilst it is not novel to assert that masculinity is neither static nor encapsulated by a discrete range of practices and dispositions (Halberstam 1998, Connell 1997, Butler 1990), it is surprising how little literature on boxing accounts for this constructivist approach to gender. The notable exception is Kath Woodward’s account of masculinity in the boxing industry through media representations (both fictional and factual), and ethnographic fieldwork in the UK (2006, 2015).

The Accra boxing family are highly globally mobile and engaged, and as such my research reflects the boxing family’s experience of a global industry and addresses the anthropological concern with a globalizing world (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999, 2000). I offer insight into the articulation of masculinities at the intersection of global imaginaries and local gender dynamics, and build on scholarship which addresses an increasingly globalized world through the lens of gendered experience (Weiss 2009; Weaver-Shiple 2009; Fergusson 1999; de Boeck 2004). Central to my interlocutors’ gendered experience is a sense of rupture between ambition and reality, aspiration and possibility.

Where others have turned to fantasy as a conceptual approach to understanding experiences of exclusion (Weiss 2009), the boxing family’s ambitions and aspirations are partially realised rather than being grounded totally in fantasy. The partial nature this reality leads to dynamics of disillusionment and critical reflection on ideals and icons. Philip de Boeck notes a similar

disillusionment with aspiration toward the imagined 'world of modernity, with its tempting promise of boundless consumerism embedded in a vision of an expansive capitalism' by Congolese in Kinshasa, for whom this world has 'become an inaccessible chimera' (2004: 48-49). De Boeck traces the creativity of lives lived despite this disillusionment. Similarly, this chapter charts the creativity of boxers in working through this disillusionment and rupture, in circumstances which do not match up to aspirations or visions of the ideal. Boxers articulate their agency by reconfiguring and distorting aspirations in response to the realities of being a boxer, both in Accra and in the global boxing industry.

For boxers in Accra, "being a man" is not a given of the male body. Rather, to "be a man" requires careful planning, hard work and often risk. The decisions that boxers make as they work toward gendered-ideals involve a critical engagement with the pervasive inequalities and power dynamics of globally connected world. These relations of power often become most apparent as boxers consider their global mobility or lack thereof. As they move, or choose not to, they engage critically with inequality of boxing as an international industry. It is this reflexive, critical engagement which I explore in this chapter.

It's Hard to Be a Man

Over Easter weekend 2015 I spent several days with Highlander, an aspiring light-heavyweight from the Attoh Quarshie, who was also a mechanic by trade and ran his own shop just north of Ga Mashie. We had been given the long weekend off from training and many of the boxers took the time to relax, go out partying and socialise. Highlander and I spent a day walking at the packed beach behind the National Arts Centre in central Accra. He told me about his life; growing up close to the border with Burkina Faso, moving to Accra as an 18 year-old and eventually beginning training at the Attoh Quarshie just over a year before, aged 29. He was an amateur at the time, but like many who enter the sport he wanted to turn professional, "win titles" and "get big fights abroad". As we talked, Highlander reflected on being a man; beginning with phrases like "if you want to be a man" or "to be a man you have to", he narrated his life to me as an ongoing project of gendered self-making.

In the evening we left the beach and headed back to his shop. The shop is on a quiet side street, and consists of a cramped passage where he keeps his tools, some stacked chairs, a table, cooking equipment, clothes and an awning. He erects the awning on the side of the street and works under it during the day. We washed at a nearby public bathroom, cleaning the sand off our legs, hands and faces, before laying out the chairs and the table in the street. Highlander sent his apprentice away to buy food, and when he returned we sat down to eat. As we ate, Highlander stopped abruptly, looked into the middle distance and said:

‘It’s hard to be a man.’

His apprentice sighed deeply and nodded from across the table. Surprised by the immediacy of his reflection, I asked why. As a man, he explained, you have to plan your future because nobody will do it for you. As a 17 year-old in the northern region he planned to come to Accra and become a mechanic, and to establish his business before becoming a boxer. Boxing, he told me, was what he had wanted to do since he was young, but first he had “make means” for himself – by creating the financial security of a successful business to support himself as he trained. As a boxer, he now plans to travel and fight abroad before retiring, returning to Ghana, building a house and adding car import to his already successful business. Being a man – not just being male, but being the man that he wanted to become - required work and a plan.

Although the details of Highlander’s plan were unique, the fact that he had one was not. Of course, reference to “being a man” alone does not definitively signal a gendered concern. Highlander’s aspirations to be a particular type of man might reflect understandings of adulthood, maturity or age without necessarily relating to gender – the social values and attributes associated with the male body. In the remainder of this chapter I show how boxers aspirations are indeed gendered and constructed against a range of different gender roles. Boxing, in one form or another, fits into my interlocutors planning and aspirations to become the men they want to be, but was never the totality of their gendered experience. Gendered experiences are constructed in relation to iconic masculinities – most notably embodied by

Floyd Mayweather or “The Best Ever” during my time in Ghana – and simultaneously against the harsh reality of structural inequality in the global boxing industry.¹⁵

As boxers articulate themselves as gendered subjects, they encounter globally-prevalent discourses of masculinity alongside gender roles grounded specifically in central Accra. Gendered performances thus reference both local idioms and ‘global fantasies’ of masculinity (Connell 1995). Like others working on the juncture of the local and global through the study of masculinity (Weaver-Shiple 2012, Weiss 2009), I argue that the material and imaginary work boxers do to pursue and reshape their aspirations responds to experiences of economic and gendered subordination. Understanding these emergent gendered experiences requires ‘viewing masculinity not as fixed in time but, instead, as constantly produced and remade in a dynamic process of historical transformation.’ (High 2010: 755, Hodgson 1999). Through an attention to gendered identities as dynamic, constantly produced and with multiple fields of reference, the power relations which boxers are subject to become visible and their agency in a global industry becomes clear.

Globalization, Fantasy and Aspiration

Following the increasing neoliberalization of many African economies from the late 1980s onward, anthropologists have argued that ‘the explosion of mobility, inclusiveness, and market openness has been matched by the palpable imposition of new forms of exclusion, marginalization and constraint’ (Weiss 2009: 8; cf. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999). Brad Weiss (2009) addresses this dynamic of inclusion-and-exclusion by exploring how for young people in Arusha, the world as it appears to be – globally connected and available – is juxtaposed against their quotidian experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. Imaginative practices of embodied fantasy, most notably embodying US hip-hop aesthetics as a way of claiming inclusion in a global community of marginalised yet engaged subjects, are thus ways of ‘living through rupture’ (Weiss 2009: 94) and creating community in the face of exclusion.

¹⁵ Mayweather is hugely successful American professional boxer who, at the time of my fieldwork, was widely considered the best active professional on the planet. “The Best Ever” is one of several nicknames by which Mayweather refers to himself.

Weiss' interlocutors 'are both able to recognize the values of a wider world they [find] uniquely compelling...yet feel almost completely incapable of realizing the potential of those values in their lives' (2009: 14). By contrast, the possibility for engagement in global flows is much more tangible for boxers in Accra. Indeed, although in many respects my interlocutors were similar to Weiss' (as young men from relatively low-income backgrounds, precariously employed and with a penchant for the aesthetics of US Hip-hop), the boxing family is extraordinarily well travelled and active in the global industry. All practicing boxers know personally, or have close personal contact with others who know, both contemporary and past global icons of the sport. As a result, boxers encounter profoundly different dynamics of inclusion and exclusion to young people elsewhere in Africa (Weiss 2002, 2009), and those engaged in alternative processes of globalisation such as the music industry (Weaver-Shipley 2004, 2009) or mining (Ferguson 1999). Although fantasy often shapes boxers' initial engagements in the sport, fantasies are ruptured where the possibility for engagement in global flows becomes a reality. For Ghanaian boxers the possible and the actual, to borrow from Weiss, are neither so clearly demarcated nor so definitively different.

To explore boxers experience of inclusion and exclusion in a global industry, I first introduce some common tropes of boxers' masculine aspirations embodied by Floyd Mayweather (aka The Best Ever - T.B.E) and examine how these aspirations relate to locally constructed gender roles. I then outline understandings of structural inequality in the global boxing industry. Following this, I sketch the career trajectories of three boxers, and consider how the three articulate themselves as men through boxing, in relation to locally specific and globally prevalent gendered discourses. Their gendered aspirations are problematized as they become globally mobile and engaged. The first is an amateur boxer unlikely ever to travel internationally through boxing. He leverages his job as a market trader (a profession dominated by women) to create a masculine aesthetic which references global mobility and financial success. The second repeatedly refuses lucrative bouts abroad as an act of resistance against his subordination in a global industry, and in order to maintain his aspirations toward becoming T.B.E. He struggles financially, and questions his gendered understanding of self as a result. The third is paid well to fight abroad but loses regularly. He earns well by fighting abroad and as a result successfully performs a different form of masculinity. These sketches show how boxers position themselves as agentive despite experiencing the sense of inclusion-and-exclusion characteristic of contemporary neoliberal African economies (Geschiere & Nymanjoh 2000).

In describing boxers' agency I draw on the work of James Laidlaw (2010), who suggests that agency should not be understood as an inherent capacity of the individual to express free will, but as the product of social situations and the public recognition of responsibility and intentionality (2010). Agency is articulated when intentionality is attributed to actions, and when public recognition of responsibility links subjects with outcomes. Agency is therefore not 'a capacity for efficacy inherent to individuals...but rather [a] matter of relations that reach into and beyond the individual' (2010: 163), and is inherently contextual and social rather than inhering in the subject. Laidlaw's concept allows for boxers' simultaneous understanding of themselves as both subordinate and subjected to relations of power, and agentive actors in a global industry. Boxers articulate agency by framing their engagements with the industry in different moral discourses, many of which relate to understandings of masculinity. By reframing their actions boxers recognise and subvert transnational prejudices, stereotypes and economic forces which subordinate and objectify them. However, the effect of this subversion is limited and consequently boxers' agency is partial, contingent and contextually dependent.

Gendered participation in the boxing family

As noted in the introduction, both men and women fulfil all the various roles of the boxing family. However, this is not to say that boxing is an un-gendered practice, nor that boxing gyms are gender-neutral spaces. Despite a generally encouraging attitude by coaches towards women who box, the boxing family remains largely male. Reflecting on this, Osman and Asare (head coach of the Wisdom gym) both described how relatively few women box for two reasons: the first was that women's boxing is not financially supported to the same extent as men's boxing, either at Amateur or Professional level. Bouts have less commercial appeal, and there is less money put into the sport by either sanctioning bodies or promoters, meaning that there are fewer opportunities to compete and earn a living either in Ghana or abroad.

The second was, in Osmans words, that:

'Women who are boxing have nobody to look up to.'

He went on to describe how many men begin boxing through a male relative who they “follow”, as discussed in the previous chapter, or are inspired by previous generations of Ghanaian boxers. With women’s boxing only recently growing in global public profile; as an Olympic sport first sanctioned in 2012 and as an increasingly popular professional spectacle, past boxing icons from Ghana are all male. Indeed, inside the gym the walls are plastered with fight posters advertising fights in Hamburg, Sydney, Las Vegas, Accra, South Africa and elsewhere around the world.¹⁶ The posters advertise high-profile bouts of current and former gym members, and are understood as a display of pride by the coaches who supervise their tacking-up on the walls, and a source of inspiration for those training in the gym. The Ghanaian boxers these posters depict, often superimposed over images of vast crowds and adorned with the branding of major sponsors such as hotel chains (the MGM-Grand for example), TV channels and sports-wear producers, are literally made into idols of a globally engaged, mobile and wealthy elite on the walls of the gym. They are also all male, except for one.

An A1 poster depicts an almost-life-size portrait of Ramatu Quaye, one of four female boxers who train regularly at the Attoh Quarshie. She wears the matching singlet and shorts of an amateur boxer about to compete, and her hands are wrapped and raised in a classic boxing pose. Her name is spelled out in clear, large font and she is superimposed over a slightly blurred image of a crowd watching a boxing match. Ramatu’s image covers the ring which would occupy the centre of the poster, and the crowd’s attention seems turned solely to her. Osman explained that the gym had made this poster precisely because there were none of female boxers on the walls of the gym.

‘It is to give her inspiration, because Ramatu was the only woman training here for a long time, so we have to help her like that. It will ginger her [inspire/give energy to her] while she is training, so that she believes in herself, so she sees where she can be.’

As I discussed in the introduction, widespread understandings of the precolonial history of boxing in Accra contribute toward the gendering of the sport as a masculine form of inclusion in society (Akyeampong 2002; Dunzendorfer 2013). Although the boxing family was by no means exclusively male in the way that others have described (Wacquant 2004; Woodward

¹⁶ This is a common aesthetic in boxing gyms around the world (cf. Woodward 2006, 2015).

2008; Oates 1987), there remains a pervasive gendered dynamic to boxing in Accra. What the above episode demonstrates is that the boxing family are critically aware of this gendering, and at times work to disrupt and reshape it.¹⁷ The remainder of this chapter explores how masculinities are constructed through the sport. I turn first to the pre-eminent boxing icon in Ghana from 2014-17, Floyd Mayweather, and explore how Mayweather relates to boxers' gendered aspirations.

T.B.E: Gendered Aspirations

Referencing iconic Ghanaian and foreign boxers is an important part of signalling aspiration and of sociality in the gym. First among icons during my time in Accra was Floyd Mayweather Jr. Mayweather is an unbeaten and hugely financially successful American boxer with a carefully curated image of mobility, financial wealth and material opulence. Current and former Ghanaian boxers were often discussed in a different register to foreign boxers, one which I discuss in more detail in chapter five and six, and represent a different form of engagement with the global boxing industry to icons from abroad like Mayweather. During my fieldwork, Mayweather was at the peak of his popularity and boxers' aspirations to global mobility, material wealth and a winning record were personified by him. While boxers watched Mayweather's fights avidly, they were equally as dedicated to the images and video-clips of Mayweather adorned with lavish clothing, huge material wealth (often cars, houses and private jets) and handling large sums of cash which circulated on social media. This proliferation of images represents a new aspect of the 'media of compression' which Weiss argues make global connection and engagement such a tantalising and tangible possibility for young people (2009: 8). Images of vast wealth through boxing are readily available and shape aspirations even if, as I go on to show, the means of realising these aspirations remains limited.

Mayweather's popularity in Accra peaked when he fought Manny Pacquiao for the world welterweight titles in May 2015 in what was (at the time) the richest bout in history. In Accra the fight was hotly anticipated. Although widely criticised in the international press,

¹⁷ Exploring women's gendered experiences of boxing would no doubt be illuminating, yet my relative paucity of ethnographic data here makes a systematic account of women's gendered experience beyond the scope of this thesis.

Mayweather was hugely popular in Ghana and particularly so at the Attoh Quarshie. Boxers wore snap-back caps and clothes branded with 'TMT' ('The Money Team: a lifestyle brand inspired by Floyd Mayweather' <http://themoneyteam.com/>), Mayweather's own brand and the name of his entourage. Shouts of "T.M.T" and "T.B.E" (The Best Ever – a similar Mayweather moniker worn on branded clothing) rung around the gym as we trained. Boxers spoke openly about their allegiance to 'T.B.E', and many lauded Mayweather's defensive skill and tactically astute style. The countless men's clothing boutiques around Ga Mashie, Korle Gonno, and Kantamanto market – the city's largest clothing market, were awash with garments printed with T.M.T and T.B.E, and many boxers enjoyed wearing the gear. Within the boxing community, few predicted a Pacquiao win, and the majority openly supported Mayweather.

I watched the fight at a beach bar close to my house with some gym-mates. The dance floor had been filled with rows of plastic chairs and a projector flooded the room with a guttering blue glow. Sipping soft drinks in the dark, we watched Mayweather beat Pacquiao convincingly over 12 rounds. The fight was a predictable masterclass in defensive boxing from Mayweather and few were surprised by the result.

I asked Abraham a few days after the fight why he liked Mayweather so much and in response he called out:

'TBE! Floyd. The. Money. Mayweather.'

Before telling me that:

'I like the way he fights, and I like his business. He works hard in training and he gets money. Floyd respects himself'.

Although distant in terms of his opulent wealth, Mayweather remains a palpable presence as several Ghanaian boxers have worked for him as sparring partners, most recently Bastie Samir. Following the 2008 Olympics, Bastie was signed as a professional by a major US-based promoter. He moved to the US for three years, during which time he worked as a sparring partner for Floyd Mayweather. Since then Bastie has returned to Ghana to continued his career as a professional boxer. Bastie is known widely, regularly spars at gyms around Accra and is, as I go on to discuss in chapter 5, often personally present around Ga Mashie. Alongside Bastie, a number of high-profile Ghanaian boxers have shared a ring with former

Mayweather opponents, including Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao – perhaps Mayweather’s two highest profile opponents prior to 2015. These boxers, namely Joshua Clottey and Ike Quartey, are also perennially present in Ga Mashie and around the boxing community. Even the youngest and least experienced boxers are likely to have watched YouTube videos of Ghanaians fighting or sparring with these international icons in Las Vegas or New York. Simultaneously, they will certainly have seen these same Ghanaians around Ga Mashie, in gyms or at fights and likely will have spoken to them, trained alongside them or perhaps even sparred with them. Joshua, Ike and Bastie (among others) are a tangible link between the Accra boxing community and the world occupied (and symbolised) by Mayweather. While Mayweather is distant in material terms he remains close enough to be known personally by boxers’ contemporaries.

The capacity to distribute material wealth is widely understood as a masculine trope in Ghana, particularly among young men (Besnier 2015: 853; Esson 2013). Mayweather’s lavish consumer lifestyle reflects boxers’ desire for a disposable income as a marker of their masculinity. Many of my interlocutors described how, as a man, one should be able to give freely to others and in public. Discussing their aspirations in the sport one afternoon, two professional boxers made this clear:

David: ‘I will get a house there and here, and I will get a nice car, top car [David and Nana playfully imitate cruising with one arm out of the window, and turning the steering wheel with the other] and I will get nice clothes, plenty. Then I will be able to give small things to people.’

Nana: ‘Yeah, I will have money and be like [mimes shuffling paper bills out of his palm into the air].’

Leo: ‘But if you give away all your money you will have none left.’

David: 'No, if you give things to people it is good, because they will respect you. You will never want.'

As David and Nana show, a self-respecting man has the capacity to give material goods and cash away. Respect (Ga – *Bu*) is a reflexive concept; one can only respect other persons who are perceived to respect themselves. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated through the lyrics of a popular Ga Hiplife artists, Shatta Wale. In a diss-song which was hugely popular among boxers, Shatta sings;

Ke o buu ohe - If you do not respect yourself

O tsoo me o buu ohe - You teach me (show me) that you do not respect yourself

Mi buu bo – I do not respect you

Bu is a relationship constituted between subjects rather than given from one subject to another. Performing self-respect demands respect from others and in this sense an attention to the self is also an attention to relationships with others. As a reflexive, relational concept *bu* helps to illuminate Abraham's earlier statement about Floyd Mayweather as a self-respecting man. For Mayweather to demonstrate self-respect through displays of material wealth and opulence, is to demand respect from others, to position himself within desired relationships with others. The respect between subjects that giving engenders was clearly gendered, as Nana went on to explain:

'If you start boxing and stop your job, your girlfriend has to be happy with you because you can make plenty of money and then you can give her things. You can buy things for her, so it is good to become a boxer as a man.'

Aside from gift-giving, self-respect is demonstrated materially through stylish and clean clothing, conspicuous displays of material wealth including cars and jewellery, and through careful and graceful bodily comportment (Weaver Shipley 2009). This was clearly apparent in the way that boxers dressing in dirty or dishevelled training gear were punished corporeally and verbally, and described as disrespectful. Similarly, and as I go on to show, the boxing community invested significant time and effort in dressing to a particular aesthetic; one reminiscent of US hip-hop stars and of Floyd Mayweather's public aesthetic. Opulent material wealth in this form is reminiscent of 'the X-way', which James Esson

describes as the 'hegemonic ideal of masculinity associated with a footballer's lifestyle' (Esson 2013: 89). For Esson's interlocutors, living the 'X-way' is a key motivation for young men's investment in sport in Accra, for whom accruing wealth is 'an inherently masculine trait' (Esson 2013: 89). I build on Esson's work here and suggest that for boxers in Accra, money and material wealth is a route to articulating masculinity through the capacity to give to others, to dress well, and in doing so to demand respect as a visibly self-respecting man. Positioning oneself as a respected masculine subject requires cultivating relationships of generosity. Despite being in an industry locally associated with wealth and opulence, many professional boxers supported families on a stipend of around 300 GHS (\$70) a month, a lower-end income in Accra. Gift giving as a route to cultivating gendered relationships of respect was difficult for many to achieve. Despite this, boxers continued to desire to be seen to be publicly generous, and were socially expected to fulfil this role. The bitter irony of this situation is not lost on boxers like Nana who bemoan the disjuncture between expectations and realities, yet many still maintain aspirations towards vast wealth through the sport.

Virile Masculinity: Giving and Getting

Boxers also aligned gift-giving away and global mobility with a sense of virile, heterosexual masculinity. A neighbour of mine, who also boxed at the Attoh Quarshie, often articulated his frustration about the relationship between material wealth and heterosexual virility. As an amateur boxer, his income through the sport was precarious, often only coming when he trained with the national team, or on the occasions when he travelled abroad to compete in international competitions. He described how the capacity to give material goods or cash away to sexual partners, implicitly women, was an important part of "being a man". He articulated this relationship when reflecting on what he perceived to be his own inadequacy:

'people say I like girls too much, that I am always with girls, coach [Washington] is always saying this. But I don't have money, so I can't get them things, so instead I talk to them a bit and give them some words instead, and then see if they want to come [have sex] with me...Like this one girl I was talking to [earlier that day]. But then she didn't want to, I can't give her anything.'

Transactional sex is not necessarily the only form of sexual activity that my interlocutors engaged in, nor the predominant one. However, my interlocutors explicitly linked material wealth and the capacity to give gifts with gendered respect (*bu*) and virile sexuality. Similarly, travel and global mobility also contributed to aspirations towards a virile masculine subjectivity. A favourite call-and-response chant of one Attoh Quarshie boxer beginning to travel as a professional articulated this succinctly:

‘Ke ote abroji [if you go abroad], fuck the yoyo! Ke ote abroji, fuck the pussy!’

Sexual encounters with women whilst abroad were particularly desirable, and I was often told publicly about such encounters (fictional or otherwise). Male boxers shared stories of sexual encounters to audiences of men and women in the gym, but I never witnessed female boxers sharing similar stories. Travel, in this sense, was an opportunity to realise and publicly recount a globally engaged, heterosexual virility. However, heterosexual virility as a marker of masculinity was problematic in the face of the realities of a life and career as a boxer, particularly when travelling abroad.

While many of my interlocutors were critical of non-heteronsexual sexualities and none claimed to have had any such sexual encounters, all those I asked claimed to know people who have non-heterosexual sex. Although there is a LGBT+ community in Accra, non-heterosexual people, and homosexual men in particular, are systematically marginalised and persecuted in Ghana, where homosexuality remains a crime. In the gym context, the physical intimacy of boxing was never openly sexualised, nor did any of my interlocutors reflect in private on this physical intimacy as sexual.¹⁸

Being an openly heterosexual male will have shaped the contours of my data collection in this regard. Although I challenged homophobic and transphobic discourse where it was safe to do so, my interlocutors often refused to engage in dialogue on non-normative sexualities and gendered experiences. The exception to this were a number of older women I lived with who occasionally elaborated on how intimate and sexual relationships between women were more permissible than those between men. My positionality, alongside the widespread

¹⁸ Boxers’ sexuality would no doubt make for an interesting ethnographic investigation. However, other than the formulaic statements of homophobia and transphobia that my interlocutors sometimes voiced, and their claims to heteronormative sexual activity, their sexuality is beyond the scope of this thesis.

marginalisation of the Ghanaian LGBT+ community made non-normative (non-heterosexual) sexualities and relationships a difficult topic to broach. My point here is not to suggest that none of my interlocutors engaged in non-heterosexual sex. Rather, they aligned heterosexual virility with an iconic, aspirational masculinity which was both ascribed to them as a stereotype, and figured in boxers own aspirations to material wealth, respect and global mobility.

The boxer as a virile, heterosexual masculine subject is a commonly held stereotype within the sport and among the public. At a meeting of the Ghanaian coaches' association, when the issue of disease transmission through bodily fluid exchange in the sport was broached an experienced coach noted with a wry smile that:

‘As we know, the boxers like to fuck all those women in Bukom.’

The statement was a double entendre; meant to raise the issue of blood-borne transmission of STDs between boxers, yet being delivered with an air of self-satisfaction and met with quiet chuckles around the room it also highlights the expectation that boxers are virile sexual actors prone to risk taking. Boxers' heterosexual virility as a marker of their masculinity is both affirmed and problematized here. Simultaneously valorising and problematizing boxers as sexual actors in this way recalls Rachel's Spronk's account of a similar ambivalence to the concept of 'African men' when used as a naturalized category of sexual actor (2009). Although clearly socially constructed, the idea of 'African men' as a specific group of actors maintains an efficacy in the lives of the men it purportedly describes (in Spronk's case young middle-class men in Nairobi) and shapes their understanding and experience of the sexual encounters they have. Similarly, boxers recognise the limits of this stereotype and criticise it, but the stereotype still shapes their gendered experience, aspirations and sense of self.

Sexualised masculinity emerged as particularly problematic in the context of boxers' regimented approach to sex prior to bouts. Celibacy is central to bodily discipline prior to a fight, as it is perceived to improve boxers' 'focus', their corporeal strength and their 'condition'.¹⁹ Conversely a loss of semen and the process of sexual intercourse or masturbation are perceived literally to reduce boxers' 'condition'. As a result, sexual activity was theoretically prohibited prior to a bout, and again theoretically limited when boxers

¹⁹ 'Condition' describes boxers' readiness to fight, and relates to boxers' adherence to training ideologies, hierarchies and concepts of bodily constitution. See chapter one.

were actively training. This presents an obvious paradox; boxers should normatively be virile men yet to be competitively successful they should also effectively be abstinent. Whereas elsewhere a loss of semen represents a problematic loss of vitality (Obeyesekere 1976) and gendered power by men to women (De Almeida 1996: 52), the loss of power and strength here is conceptualised as between men, pointing toward the emphasis on masculine sociality in the sport. The strain of this paradox is heightened when boxing abroad. The limited time associated with travel abroad (usually maximum two weeks prior to a fight) makes this problematic more immediate. To pursue a globally engaged, virile masculinity whilst abroad is to knowingly reduce one's 'condition' immediately prior to a fight, and undermine the dependence, hierarchy and trust between coach and boxer (outlined in chapters one and two), whereby each is invested in and cares for the interests of the other. Different aspects of gendered aspiration are pitted against one-another when boxers become globally mobile. Realising these aspirations also undermines relationships of hierarchy and dependence between coaches and boxers.

As a perceived route to material wealth and international mobility, boxing relates to locally grounded understandings of what it means to be a man. *Bu* – respect – demonstrates that articulating oneself as a masculine subject is about cultivating relationships of generosity and affirmation, rather than simply through the possession or display of material wealth. Gift giving and global mobility are also seen as ways of enacting a virile heterosexual masculinity. Mayweather, as an icon of global mobility, success in the ring and vast material wealth, is thus emblematic of a subjectivity which references locally grounded gender roles and ideals. Boxing is understood as a route to an iconic, masculine subjectivity which relates to both global imaginaries of mobility and wealth and to masculinities grounded locally in central Accra (cf. Weiss 2009).

Boxing Abroad: Power in a Global Industry

Although global mobility is often central to boxers' gendered aspirations, these aspirations are tempered by an understanding of the power-dynamics which pervade boxing as a global industry. Between 2014 and 2017 boxers I knew travelled to the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Germany, Denmark, Algeria, Morocco,

Namibia, Kazakhstan, China, Latvia and Brazil to fight. Prior to my arrival and since my departure, the list is much longer. The Accra boxing community is globally mobile and engaged. However, boxing abroad is understood to be a different game to boxing in Ghana, as the below vignette shows.

On the 9th September 2011 Obodai Sai fought abroad for the first time, at the Hilton Hotel in Mayfair, London. He defended his newly-acquired commonwealth light-middleweight title against Jamie Cox, a highly rated prospect from Swindon, who had won a gold medal at the 2006 commonwealth games as an amateur. When they met, both were undefeated. An ex-professional and a long-time boxing pundit commented for the broadcast on Sky Box Office that night. Although many, including Sky's pundits, had expected Cox to win convincingly, by the end of the fight it was clear that Obodai had the better of his opponent. Below are some excerpts from Sky's commentary:

Commentator 1: 'you don't meet many soft Ghanaians do you, they're all tough fellas.'

commentator two laughs

...

Commentator 1: 'he'll be tough you see. It's one of the great strengths of Ghanaian fighters, they're very hard, physical fighters, they can take a lot of stick. And they're always there. They're very, very durable.'

...

Commentator 2: 'Boxers like these tough Ghanaians, they look tired, but then they bring a shot out of nowhere.'

Obodai lost the fight by unanimous decision. A chorus of boos rang around the Hilton's grand dining room as Cox's hand was held aloft and the MC announced:

‘And the new commonwealth light-middleweight champion...’

Sky’s pundits were similarly disappointed although not entirely surprised, and after some brief reflection on a poor decision closed their broadcast with:

‘Well, it’s a real shame that.’

As they did so, the camera panned across the ring to show Alloway (in Obodai’s corner that night) stamping across the ring shouting “No! No! No!” into the glare of the ring lights and the darkness beyond. As Alloway vented, the camera switched to Obodai who leant back against the ring ropes, mouth slightly ajar as he looked left and right, bemused.

-

What happened that night is not unusual. Both the outcome of the fight and the commentators’ descriptions of “these tough Ghanaians” speak of the inequalities and power dynamics which pervade the global boxing industry and shape the Accra boxing community’s engagement with the industry. As boxers become globally mobile they encounter the stereotypes voiced by the pundits above, and power relations which locate Ghana as peripheral and subordinate in a global industry. Boxers’ gendered sense of self and aspirations are re-shaped in light of these stereotypes and inequality. I now explore how the barriers and opportunities that this inequality presents are understood and lived.

What is a “Tough Ghanaian”?

The stereotype of Ghanaian boxers as “rugged”, “durable”, “tough”, “hard” and “physical” pervades commentaries on the sport whenever Ghanaians are involved – both at home and abroad.²⁰ Boxers’ masculinities are constructed in light of, and against, this stereotype and

²⁰ Similar dynamics have been noted elsewhere regarding racialized bodies in dutch football (van Sterkenberg et. al 2012) and US basketball (Eastman & Billings 2001).

the structures of power it represents. Although it is understood to be a stereotype, it has efficacy in the lives of the Accra boxing family. Similar dynamics have been noted in professional football, where African teams are often characterised in European commentary as succeeding by virtue of physical attributes which reflect an imagined African body. African teams are described as notably 'physical' and possessing 'power and pace', whereas their European or non-African counterparts are characteristically understood as 'strategic', 'disciplined' and 'creative' (Yeku 2018, van Sterkenberg et. al 2012). Sporting success is attributed to naturalized stereotypes of an 'African' body, perpetuating colonial stereotypes and relations of power. Again Rachel Spronk's work on how the discursive construct of 'African Men' shapes articulations and experiences of masculinity in contemporary Nairobi is helpful in understanding the boxers experience of such pervasive stereotypes (Spronk 2014: 514). Like the 'idea of African Men' which Spronk deconstructs as a discursive fiction, the idea of a "Ghanaian boxer" functions as a naturalized social construct which remains meaningful in shaping the boxing family's work and self-perception. However, while Spronk's interlocutors naturalize 'African Men' as a category of sexual actor when reflecting on their own gendered experience, the boxing family at times naturalize and at others reflect critically on the "Ghanaian boxer" as meaningful yet socially constructed. The parallels between Spronk's critique of 'African Men' as a discursive construct presumed to be an *a priori* category, and the way that Sky's commentators describe "Ghanaian boxers" and Ghanaian men are clear. "Ruggedness", "Durability" and "Hardness" – all physical characteristics – become *a priori* qualities of male Ghanaian bodies. This naturalized body is clearly gendered – Ghanaians are archetypally "tough fellas".

As an *a priori* category Spronk argues that the idea of 'African Men' resonates with problematic and orientalisng concepts of "otherness" (implicitly defined as non-Western), reflects a static and a-historical concept of "traditional masculinity", and reproduces a stereotype of hyper-sexualisation and violence which is reminiscent of the racist, colonial stereotypes used to justify relationships of subordination (2014: 508). She explores how the idea of African men is produced as through NGO and public health analysis and discourse (2014). My ethnography furnishes an account of the Accra boxing family's perception of, and engagements with, an industry which produces a similar 'discursive reality' of the "Ghanaian boxer". As they navigate and negotiate this profoundly unequal industry, the boxing family reflect critically on others' construction of "Ghanaian Boxers" and the power-relations this construction belies. In doing so they work with and against inequality in a way which is typical

of the contradictory nature of agency in an increasingly neoliberal order (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999).

“They are always there”: Navigating inequality

‘It’s one of the great strengths of Ghanaian fighters, they’re very hard, physical fighters... they’re always there.’

Sky commentator 1

As noted above, male Ghanaian bodies are understood to be physically resilient and strong in the boxing industry. However, the proclamation that Ghanaian fighters are ‘always there’ references the idea that they are also willing to take fights which they understand that they will likely lose. By drawing out this second, subtler, construction of the “Ghanaian boxer” I consider how the boxing family understand the global inequalities inherent to the sport, and demonstrate some ways which they navigate these inequalities.

Accra boxers are often offered fights abroad at short notice with what was considered insufficient preparation time, and are also regularly overmatched when fighting abroad.²¹ To be clear this is not to say that matches are fixed. Rather, matches are made to favour one boxer over another. This is in part because of the global financial dynamics of the sport which position global south nations and sporting communities as cheap sources of labour for global north sporting markets (Besnier & Brownell 2012; Besnier 2015). The largest markets for boxing are Western Europe and North America, followed closely by Central America and recently China. Successful promoters working in these markets have larger financial resources available to them than promoters based in Ghana, and thus have the capacity to arrange and finance large-scale, high-grossing, ‘cards’ (boxing events featuring more than one fight) in the locations of their choice. ‘Cards’ are profit-making exercises and therefore happen where the biggest perceived market is, more often than not outside Ghana.²²

²¹ To overmatch a boxer is to match them with a boxer of superior skill, to the extent that the bout is uncompetitive and the result, whilst not certain, is highly likely.

²² This recently began to change with a number of promotional companies investing in higher profile bout in Ghana since late 2016. This investment represents an interesting shift in contemporary geo-politics of boxing and would make for interesting further research.

It remains in Global-North promoters' interest to maintain the winning records of the boxers they promote; to maintain their earning potential as successful boxers whilst having them fight regularly. As a result, financially powerful promoters whose interests are vested in the boxers they promote (boxers largely from Western Europe, North and Central America, although occasionally cherry-picked from elsewhere including the African continent) are often in need of "credible" opposition who do not pose undue risk of winning. To fill this gap, global north promoters often recruit Ghanaian boxers. As one boxer, who had fought outside Ghana a number of times, explained in relation to a commonwealth title fight in London:

'My opponent was *well known North American promoter's* boy. So how can I win? If it is your boxer fighting, you [the promoter] have to make sure he wins so that you [the promoter] keep the belts, you don't let them go. So if I go, how can I win? The scorecards cannot let me win, I will need a knockout.'

This boxer references the fact that not only will the match likely be uneven, but even if he outboxes his opponent on the night he will struggle to win a decision on the judges' scorecards, just as Obodai did against Cox.²³ It was widely understood, and is throughout the boxing industry, that winning away from home is made more difficult because judges tend to favour the home-fighter. As a result, a knockout is often required to win abroad, further reducing the likelihood of winning abroad. Boxers travelling to fight outside Ghana know this and often speak about "training for a knockout" prior to travelling abroad. These global dynamics reflect and perpetuate the idea of "Ghanaian boxers" as a resource in a global industry. Given their naturalized corporeal physicality and toughness, and recognition that they are often reasonably skilful, "Ghanaian boxers" provide credible opposition for financially-powerful global-north promoters and their boxers.

While coaches and experienced boxers are aware of these dynamics, those earlier in their careers often develop this understanding as they move through the sport. Washington described how, despite understanding these disadvantages, many take bouts abroad:

'If a Ghanaian boxer is offered a fight abroad they cannot refuse, they must go.'

²³ Similar dynamics of global north boxing promotion companies sourcing cheap labour from global south countries has been discussed elsewhere (cf. Takahata 2000).

His reasoning reflects the prestige and significantly higher earning potential of fighting abroad – opportunities which contribute towards boxers’ gendered aspirations. He explained that:

‘So many of these boys, they have grown up here where they have so little. So if you say to them:

“Come to the UK for a fight, come to the US for a fight, I will pay you \$50,000, or \$20,000, or even \$10,000.”

This is not big money even for a fight abroad, but they have to go. How much is \$50,000 In Ghana [cedis]? So much. They must go, how can they say no to that money?’

Ghanaian coaches perceive that this willingness to box abroad in unfavourable conditions is exploited by promoters in the Global North. They link this willingness directly to the relative poverty of many boxers’ lives in Accra. The “Ghanaian boxer” as a discursive reality is understood to be willing to participate as subordinate in a global market; easily, and cheaply, manipulated into “being there” in person despite the inequality of that industry. In terms of their economic marginalisation and subordination to promotional powers in the Global North, “Ghanaian Boxers” remain “always there”.

In this way “Ghanaian Boxers” are naturalized as possessing gendered physical attributes and as being driven by a logic of poverty. They are “tough fellas” whose bodies are naturally durable and strong, and who are sufficiently skilful to “be there” as credible opposition. Simultaneously, their relative poverty is assumed to be sufficient motivation to sign a contract, get on a plane and “be there” in person despite knowing that they stand little chance of winning. By accepting uneven fights abroad the boxing family contribute to a hegemonic, naturalized discourse of the “Ghanaian Boxer” as subordinate and easily manipulated. In a Bourdieusian sense boxers are complicit in their own subordination in an exploitative global industry (Wacquant 2004, 1995). However, to reduce this willingness to rational economic behaviour alone negates the influence of boxers’ culturally informed aspirations and discounts their own understandings of agency in making decisions about global engagement. Boxers are acutely aware of the inequality of the international industry and their gendered aspirations reflect a nuanced engagement with the discursive construct

of “Ghanaian Boxers” as both a route to realising aspirations *and* a process of subordination. Understanding how decisions about global engagement are (re)framed in different discourses of success - as a professional boxer and a man - allows space to understand boxers’ agency in the face of this subordination.

The dynamics of the global boxing industry are eerily reminiscent of colonial relations, and offer a critique of how colonial over relations persist in a post-colonial world (Yeku 2018, van Sterkenberg et al. 2012). Their object is the body and labour of young Ghanaian men. As I discuss in chapter five, engagements with a profoundly unequal industry involve re-framing dynamics of centre and periphery in the global boxing industry, and in doing so articulating Ghana as a globally connected “centre”.

Refiguring Success, Constructing Agency

The prospect of a title, financial reward and boxing in a prestige location made the risks associated with boxing abroad worth taking, Washington explained one afternoon. A willingness to take fights despite structural disadvantage was seen as necessary by many boxers and coaches, and the tangibility of others’ success abroad made the risks more appealing. As boxers grew more experienced, coaches actively worked to shift their aspirations to account for the structural dynamics of the industry. This often took the form of shifting attitudes towards losing.

Many of the lectures delivered by Washington and Alloway after training (or similarly by Asare at the Wisdom gym, Quaye at FitSquare, Theophilus at Akotoko Academy etc.) addressed the concept of success in the sport. Central to these sessions was the idea of “performance” as a more useful evaluative measure than winning. After competitions, amateur and professional boxers were often made to assess the “performance” of their peers, and were instructed to judge irrespective of the result of a bout. Winning was not the only standard by which a boxer could, and should, be measured. Outside of these lectures, coaches spoke about the problem of boxers rejecting lucrative opportunities to box abroad by guarding a winning record too closely. They explained that too many boxers wanted to remain unbeaten, a problem directly attributed to the popularity of Mayweather, whose unbeaten record was widely lauded by boxers. As Osman elaborated on this logic:

‘If you go to the UK and you perform well, you fight well, even if you lose, then they will like you...and they will give you another fight.’

He went on to explain this in relation to a boxer from another gym:

‘Samuel, he took a fight in the UK and he was fighting *hard*, the fans there enjoyed him. He lost, but for fight they paid him £10,000. But because of his *performance*, because they loved watching him box even though he lost, they gave him two more fights there...I think for like £30,000 each time. So now he is walking around wearing all these nice clothes and things, he has some money for those things because of his *performance*.’

Osman lauded Samuel’s aspirational shift, and his understanding of the ‘losing’ role in boxing as a route to material wealth, global mobility and as a result the capacity to position himself as a respected and self-respecting man. Refiguring understandings of success allows the material wealth and global mobility of masculine aspirations to be realised, by compromising aspiration towards a winning record and ‘becoming a champion’. This refiguring is a direct response to the power inequalities which position “Ghanaian Boxers” as subordinate in a global industry. Samuel occupies the subordinate masculine position of the archetypal “Ghanaian Boxer” in a global industry, as a route to embodying and realising other aspects of his gendered aspirations through the sport.

Despite this inequality, there remains the possibility of winning bouts abroad.²⁴ This is tangible like so many aspects of boxers aspiration, rather than being pure fantasy. For example, Joshua Okine and Charles Adamu, both current Attoh Quarshie boxers, took Commonwealth title-fights in the UK knowing that they would likely lose, and won. Okine and Adamu are, however, exceptional – most boxers taking short-notice fights abroad lose, as both Okine and Adamu have done since.

As coaches and experienced boxers introduce a discourse in which leveraging the figure of the “Ghanaian boxer” in the global industry becomes a route to fulfilling gendered

²⁴ Talented Ghanaian boxers are sometimes ‘cherry picked’ by global north promoters to train and fight abroad, and as such fight under significantly different social dynamics to those I describe here. While they may still be understood to corporeally represent the “tough fellas” stereotype of Ghanaian boxers, their backing by major promoters ensures that they do not face the same dynamics of structural inequality when boxing abroad. Currently, these boxers number fewer than ten. Notable contemporary examples are Frederick Lawson, Richard Commey and Duke Micah.

aspirations rather than being subordinated, they subtly reframe travelling to lose as agentive rather than passive and subordinate. The public and discursive format of these lecture, and the myriad other conversations about decisions to travel, reflect Laidlaw's concept of agency as emerging from the recognition of responsibility and intentionality between subjects, rather than as an inherent capacity of the individual to get what they want done (2010). The lectures that coaches deliver after training which encourage boxers to shift their aspirations, recognise agency in those boxers who take fights abroad – whether they earn well (as Samuel did) or whether they unexpectedly win (as Joshua Okine and Charles Adamu did). Appropriating the role of the “tough Ghanaian fella” is understood as taking responsibility for the benefits of the bout's outcome, rather than being used by the industry.

Ratele and Everitt Penhale argue that the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ belies the way that masculinities, particularly black masculinities, can be simultaneously dominant and subordinate, venerated and demonised (2015). This logic reflects the complexity of embodying the “Ghanaian Boxer” role in a global industry. The boxer as a gendered icon in Ghana is dominant and aspired to – think of the posters adorning the walls of the gym, the veneration of past Ghanaian champions and the idolisation of Floyd Mayweather – and yet is simultaneously understood to be subordinate in a global industry. By reshaping one's aspirations, what otherwise might be considered subordination comes to represent a route to realising aspirations. Agency in a global industry is articulated by reflexively inhabiting the discursive construct of the “Ghanaian Boxer”, as Samuel did, and appropriating the losing role as a route to fulfilling, rather than denying, aspiration.

Boxers agonised over the trade-offs involved in these decisions. This is no surprise, as they challenge boxers' gendered understandings of self. Building on this understanding of boxing as reflecting both dominant and subordinate masculinities, and agency as being recognised through intentionality and responsibility, I now sketch three different paths that boxers took towards realising their gendered aspirations. I consider the painful ruptures which emerge as they work towards aspirations. The boxing family carve space for agency in the face of inequality and subordination by reframing moments of subordination in alternative (often gendered) discourses of success. Boxers' gendered experience is characterised by a reality of partial and contingent agency in a global industry, rather than fantasies of global engagement in the face of pervasive exclusion (Weiss 2002, 2009; Weaver Shipley 2009).

Sketches

The first sketch considers an amateur boxer who has never travelled to box and likely never will. A lack of opportunity to travel presents different challenges to boxers' gendered sense of self, and opens alternative spaces in which to creatively author oneself as a man. In doing so, (unrealizable) aspiration itself becomes a key marker of masculinity.

Daniel

Daniel is a 31-year old welterweight (69kg) amateur boxer at the Attoah Quarshie. He has boxed there for over seven years. He wears a polished, bald scalp and sometimes sports a carefully trimmed, Marvin Hagler-esque handlebar moustache.²⁵

Daniel is also a market trader, a profession dominated by women in Ghana, at Kantamanto, the large clothing market close to Accra railway station. One train leaves the station each morning, and the market spills onto the idle tracks after its departure. Daniel trades primarily in clothing of the Hip-Hop-inspired style popular among young men in Accra, particularly among boxers. Brands such as October's Very Own (or OVO – the rapper Drake's record label), YMCMB (Young Money Cash Money Billionaires – brand of the 'Young Money' hip-hop crew), TMT (Mayweather's brand) and Jordan AIR (after the basketball player Michael Jordan) are popular. At the market Daniel is known as a boxer, and takes pride in conspicuously leaving work in the afternoon to train.

In the gym, Daniel sports carefully-curated attire branded with major sports-wear labels (Nike, Adidas etc.), basketball and football team logos. Football and/or branded sportswear is popular in the gym, and boxers and coaches carefully choose, wash and prepare their gear each day. Daniel's attire is among the most varied, flamboyant and carefully curated in the gym. It reflects a masculine aesthetic which references wealthy sporting icons and revels in

²⁵ Hagler is an American former-middleweight champion who wore a polished bald scalp and handlebar moustache throughout his career in the 1970s-80s. The iconic combination, particularly when worn by boxers, is often an overt reference to Hagler and the style he popularised.

being obviously matched and prepared. It was no surprise, then, when Daniel emerged from the changing-room one day in bright-white shorts and top with gold trim, the letters “TBE” emblazoned in gold across the shoulders, and a pair of gold “Title” gloves (a popular American brand of boxing equipment). As he walked out of the changing room, he was greeted with shouts of “TBE” and “FLOYD!”, to which he responded “TBE! THE. MONEY. TEAM.”. The outfit was put together with care, and garnered a response which clearly recognised the iconography it referenced and with which Daniel seemed pleased. His material and verbal commitment echoes analyses of young African men’s claims to inclusion in global movements in the face of limited opportunities for legitimate inclusion in locally-constructed gender roles and forms of community (Weiss 2003; Weaver-Shiple 2009; Besnier 2015:851).

Despite his ostentatious dress sense and constant referencing of Mayweather, Daniel was understood to be a relatively poor boxer. This became most apparent when boxers were told to rank themselves ‘by level’ (see chapter three) where Daniel would self-identify among the boxers of a lower “level”. Yet, Daniel would sincerely speak about his desire to be a ‘champion’ and ‘The Best Ever’. Following a fight-night on the outskirts of Accra, I asked Daniel how his bout went the following week. He told me that he lost on points, and explained with a deliberately American drawl that:

‘I gotta’ keep trainin’. You gotta’ train to be the best.’

His commitment to becoming ‘T.B.E.’ was also embodied in the way that he mimicked Mayweather’s characteristic low-handed guard in the ring, much to the chagrin of the coaches. The ‘shoulder roll’, dropping the lead hand low and sandwiching the chin between the rear-hand and forward-shoulder, is central to Mayweather’s defensive repertoire. However, successful execution requires a high degree of skill which Daniel does not possess, and the technique is specifically not taught by the Attah Quarshie coaches. Hence their annoyance when Daniel routinely appropriated what they perceive to be an inappropriate technique.

Although Daniel regularly spoke about travelling to the USA to fight he had never boxed outside of Accra. Despite this gulf between his aspirations and the possibilities which presented themselves, Daniel was a valued part of the gym community. He was often chosen to represent the Attah Quarshie at public events such as funerals or christenings, to which

the gym would send selected representatives. Washington and Osman liked Daniel, and described him as a “good boy” who “respected” because he trained hard and regularly, and contributed to the gym community. Similarly, other boxers described how Daniel was a “good person” who “respected himself”. They cited the fact that he regularly gave away items of clothing and small amounts of cash to other boxers, paid for drinks, taxis, and helped boxers and coaches to source specific items from the market. Daniel’s aspirational veneration of Mayweather operates on several levels; materially in his clothing, vocally in his referencing of Mayweather’s nicknames and brands, and ideologically in his commitment to becoming ‘T.B.E’.

Becoming ‘T.B.E’ – involuntary immobility, aspiration and agency

Daniel presents an aspirational contradiction - aware of his lack of boxing skill, but simultaneously skilled at materially performing his aspiration. Unpacking this contradiction requires an understanding of how Daniel leverages the gendered role of market trading in Accra. Market trading in central Accra has long been dominated by women, and considered a feminine form of labour (Esson 2013: 88, Overa 2007, Theil & Stasic 2016, Robertson 1990). Overa (2007) and Theil & Stasic (2016) trace the importance of matrilineal transmission of trading knowledge and stall-space in this gendering of market trading. Conversely, formal employment and the public sector have historically been considered masculine domains in Ghana (Esson 2013). Others have argued that the increasingly neoliberal policies of the Ghanaian government have reduced men’s capacity for formal or public sector employment – conceptually masculine roles (Esson 2013, 2015; Weiss 2009). In doing so, these changes have precipitated a “crisis in masculinity” whereby young men must find employment in “feminine” roles, and as such find alternative ways to express themselves as masculine subjects.

In this context, Daniel’s work in the market is a reconfiguration of normative gendered employment roles. Daniel trades exclusively in clothes which reference the iconic masculinity which he and many others aspire towards. The goods he sells contribute to overt performances of a masculine subjectivity contextually specific to Accra; he is a purveyor of the materials of a specific masculine performance. Like others who trade in men’s fashion, Daniel creatively re-works the gendering of market-trading. Daniel also leverages this

position to articulate himself as an ideal masculine aspirant; few others at the gym would have had the resources, knowledge or opportunity to put together the 'T.B.E' outfit which was so lauded, and which he wore with such pride. In particular, the skills and connections to have the vest printed with 'T.B.E', alongside the cash to buy the shirt, would have been beyond many boxers. In addition, his relatively successful business at the market allows him the cash and material resources to give cash and gifts generously to the gym community, and in doing so position himself as a respectable and respected man. His relatively stable income through trading is something many professional boxers do not possess. Daniel's skill in fashioning a masculine aesthetic is not lost on his gym-mates, many of whom ask him for advice and help in acquiring particular items, and who respected his capacity to be materially generous as a way of performing the generous masculinity to which so many aspired.

Despite his material and ideological commitment to becoming 'T.B.E', Daniel is widely understood not to have sufficient boxing skills to travel abroad to fight. As an 'involuntarily immobile' boxer (Carling 2002), Daniel does not engage with his subordination as a Ghanaian man in the global industry and his gendered aspirations toward becoming T.B.E are not disturbed by having to realise the figure of the "tough Ghanaian fella". For Daniel, the possible and the actual remain so disparate that his aspirations are not disturbed by the immediacy of their being realised.

However, Daniel is not naïve enough to be ignorant of his exclusion. Rather, his conscious and skilled performance of aspiration as a state of being becomes central to articulating masculinity and agency. Daniel's agency is recognised by the gym community as he invokes the figure of the aspirant boxer *and* because he leverages his economic success in the market to be publicly generous to others, and as such gain respect as a man. Rather than lamenting the lack of skill which leaves him 'involuntarily immobile' (de Haas 2010), Daniel frames his training as a moral practice of aspiration and 'hustling', and is widely respected for this despite his lack of skill. Daniel draws creatively on the resources and discourses available to him: by re-organising the gendered occupation of market-trading both through the goods he sells – goods which speak directly to aspirant masculinities in Accra by quite literally referencing masculine icons (T.B.E. branded clothing), and by enlisting his skill as a purveyor of particular types of clothing to carefully curate his masculine aspiration. As Daniel demonstrates, skill as a boxer is not the only way of articulating oneself in the mould of an iconic masculinity, of announcing your commitment to becoming 'T.B.E'.

An aesthetic claim to inclusion in the face of marginalisation in this way resonates with Brad Weiss' account of 'Thug realism' and embodied fantasy. Weiss' interlocutors inhabit their own exclusion by creating male space which symbolically re-construct no-longer attainable gender dynamics (Weiss 2004), and by claiming inclusion in a global, masculine 'Hip-Hop nation' through their aesthetic choices of clothing hairstyle and bodily comportment (2002, 2009). However, rather than re-creating a now-lost masculine aesthetic, boxers like Daniel refigure everyday gender relations in order to creatively inhabit their exclusion from a global industry. They author themselves as masculine subjects not in spite of their exclusion, but because exclusion permits genuine and sincere aspiration to become 'T.B.E'.

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The second sketch is of Abraham, a middleweight who turned professional in late 2013, and so was a relative newcomer to the professional sport. This sketch begins with a meeting between Abraham, Washington and Abraham's manager, John.

Abraham

Sometime after I arrived at Washington's house one Sunday afternoon, Abraham and John appeared at the door. John is an engineer working primarily in Minnesota who travels between Ghana and the USA. He has no boxing experience and little industry knowledge, but is a childhood friend of Abraham – the two grew up as neighbours. In late 2016, John had begun managing Abraham. Given John's relative lack of industry knowledge, this effectively meant he provided Abraham with a stipend and equipment, and Abraham chose which fights to take with Washington's guidance.

The meeting covered plans for increasing Abraham's domestic popularity and planning his career trajectory. John proposed carefully selecting domestic (Ghanaian) opponents in order to build an unbeaten record of seventeen fights (a common strategy for a prospect), before travelling abroad to fight for larger purses and titles. It transpired that Abraham had been offered a fight in China several months later against a Chinese boxer unknown to the three. The fight was not for a title, but would be lucrative. The three discussed whether Abraham could win: whether the judges would favour the home fighter, and whether Abraham was

being overmatched by the Chinese matchmaker. Abraham suggested that the judging would be unfavourable, so he did not want to go. John, similarly, did not want Abraham to risk the bout 'because of poverty', as he put it. He argued that too many Accra boxers take fights abroad knowing they will likely lose, because of the significant financial incentives. As a result, they 'spoil their record' (rack up defeats), reducing future earning potential, and the prospect of fighting for championship titles. Washington quickly conceded that this might be the case, and the conversation moved on to Abraham's social media presence.

Abraham never fought in China. Indeed, this was not the first time he had refused lucrative fights abroad. Earlier that year he had refused a bout in the UK on similar grounds. In each instance, he traded-off the opportunity to become globally mobile and financially successful against maintaining the aspiration to an unbeaten record and becoming a champion. In doing so he rejected the subordination of playing the "tough Ghanaian fella" role, and maintained his aspiration to the constellation of masculine traits embodied by T.B.E.

Washington, however, had wanted Abraham to take the fight. He explained that China was not renowned for professional boxing so he suspected that Abraham would likely be the better boxer and could push for either a decisive points win or a knockout. Furthermore, the fight was some months away leaving plenty of time for preparation and meaning Abraham would likely be in optimum "condition" before he travelled. For Washington, risking an unbeaten record is worth the money, the opportunity to travel and chance of winning abroad. For Abraham, the risk was not worth the opportunity, nor the certainty of enacting his own subordination. Washington and Abraham locate Abraham's decision in different discourse of success and appropriate levels of risk. Paradoxically, in the moment of potentially realising a masculine ideal through global travel for financial reward, boxers face the reality of their subordination. Although Washington and Abraham's different approaches reflect different understandings of Abraham's agency in this situation, both men clearly recognise and respond to the global inequalities which subordinate Ghanaian boxers.

Decisions about global mobility are reflexive and require boxers like Abraham to imagine themselves through the discursive reality of "Ghanaian Boxers". Abraham's decision to refuse the fights is not 'involuntary immobility' (Carling 2002), as is the case for Weiss' interlocutors (2002, 2009) or boxers like Daniel. Rather, his decision reflects what Hein de Haas describes as 'the need to simultaneously capture movement and non-movement into

and agentic definition of mobility' (2014: 26). Abraham refuses the inclusion and global engagement he aspires towards in the moment it becomes a real possibility, because that inclusion is only partial and on terms which undermine his gendered aspirations and sense of self. He sees voluntary immobility is an act of resistance against the relationships which define Ghanaian boxers as subordinate in that industry; he refuses to reproduce and justify the structure of his own subordination.

Boxers who refuse such "opportunities", who remain voluntarily immobile, struggle to display the material wealth and mobility expected of them. This was abundantly clear for Abraham, who often described the shame he felt in borrowing money to support his family, and who was forced to avoid creditors around his neighbourhood. He described the paradox of his experience of professional boxing in the following terms:

People think "This man is a professional boxer, he should have plenty things." And then they are asking you for small things, chop money...Because they have seen Floyd [Mayweather] and Pac-man [Manny Pacquiao], they think that because you are a boxer you should have so much too.

In particular, he lamented not being able to pay the school fees for his son, or provide "chop-money" (spending money) for his wife and child, leading him to question his own worth as a husband, a father and a man. He described how:

If you are a man, you should be able to give something small to your wife, say "here, go spend this chop money", but I cannot...it pains me.

Abraham's position is at once hegemonic and subordinate. He maintains a potentiality towards his aspirational ideal of becoming a champion with an unbeaten record by refusing to participate in his own subordination, and refusing to reproduce the 'discursive reality' of the "tough Ghanaian fella". However, by doing so he occupies a subordinate position as a poor and globally static boxer in Accra. His capacity to perform locally embedded forms of masculinity as professional boxer, a husband and a father, lead him to painfully question his gendered sense of self-worth.

Abraham frames his immobility as voluntary by refusing to fight, and in doing so articulates himself as acting against a structure he perceives to be corrupt and unfair. Abraham ascribes intentionality to his immobility, takes responsibility for not perpetuating the subordination

of Ghanaians in the global boxing industry and maintains his aspirations towards an unbeaten record. In doing so he is recognised as an agentive actor as John. However, Abraham's decision to remain voluntarily immobile is questioned by Washington, who wanted Abraham to take the bout. Framing Abraham's refusal in an alternative discourse of success where appropriating the figure of the "tough Ghanaian fella" is deemed agentive rather than subordinate, Abraham's agency is denied. Similarly, Abraham's own understanding of himself as an agentive actor is undermined when he struggles to fulfil publicly expected roles as a father, husband and boxer, and in doing so occupies a subordinate gendered position in Accra. His agency in refusing fights is continuous with a sense of subordination and self-doubt.

When professional boxers in Accra become globally mobile they encounter macro-structural forces which offer only partial inclusion in a global industry, inclusion which undermines boxers' aspirations to a winning record and becoming a champion. Agency is negotiated as boxers locate their decisions about global mobility in different discourses of success. Boxers' gendered experience highlights the work that goes in to navigating the dilemmas of locally grounded aspirations in the face of global inequalities.

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The final sketch is of Isaac, an international journeyman who takes a relatively well-paid fight "on the road" understanding that he will likely lose. Unlike domestic Ghanaian Journeymen, who are enmeshed in relationships of mutuality which demand care and respect (see chapter 2), journeymen fighting abroad do not understand themselves as relational subjects in the same way. Their opponents are not ethically bound to care for them as others in the Accra boxing family are. Therefore, fighting as a journeyman abroad is often much more competitive (rather than the tempered exchanges outlined in chapter two) and dangerous.

Isaac

In late 2015 Isaac Quartey, an experienced professional featherweight, was offered a bout in Malta. Isaac was nearing the end of his career and no longer trained regularly, but began training regularly prior to the fight. Isaac is a fisherman by trade but at the time was founding

a Pentecostal church in Chorkor, two suburbs west of Ga Mashie. After training one day Isaac described how the fight was a huge help as it would allow him to acquire the funds to build a church. I tentatively asked who his opponent was and what his chances of winning were. He replied immediately that he knew he would lose;

‘They just want me to come and lose. But it’s ok because I can lose, take the money and build my Church.’

At the time Issac was an itinerant preacher who moved through Chorkor, Korle Gonno, Mamprobi and Ga Mashie preaching in the street. He had wanted to buy a plot of land to build a Church on for some time, and explained that:

‘If you want to be a preacher, you should have a church. At the moment I am moving, I am moving. But if I build the church, people will come there and I will have a congregation. It is better to be like that than always moving.’

Acquiring a single site would shift Issac’s preaching from itinerant to geographically stable and allow him to grow a congregation of his own. Isaac’s aspirations and the way he imagined his future-self no longer related to the iconic boxing masculinity embodied by T.B.E. For Isaac, boxing abroad meant principally the opportunity to earn money as a means to realising a different masculine subjectivity – the Pastor. By appropriating the figure of the “tough Ghanaian fella”, Isaac locates his choice in the altered discourse of success which Osman, Washington and others encouraged boxers to understand their work through, where success related not to fights won, but money earned and global mobility. Simultaneously, Isaac’s decision is located in a parallel gendered discourse of success which values having a plot of land and a physical church above being a pastor.

Isaac’s choices also show that boxing as a masculine practice is neither discrete or totalising. Rather, boxing is one of multiple and continuous ways in which boxers understand themselves as men, and seek to be understood by others as such. High argues that masculinities are constructed generationally, in relation to both older and younger men, which calls for attention to the temporal aspect to masculinity (2015). As boxers move through a career and age, their aspirations shift (as Isaacs have), and they articulate themselves as men in different ways.

Gendered Rupture and the Violence of Subordination

Not all boxers who become international journeymen are as nonchalant as Isaac. The ambivalent and social nature of agency as I have described it leads to considerable tension in boxers' lives as they refigure their aspirations and reframe their actions. It is not uncommon for successful prospects and championship boxers in Ghana (rather than professionals in the twilight of their career like Isaac) to take fights abroad knowing that they will likely lose. In doing so, they switch from championship boxers or prospect in the Ghanaian boxing context to overmatched 'international Journeymen', performing the role of the "tough Ghanaian fella". On the few occasions that this happened, boxers were very reluctant to discuss the details of their fights abroad. When they did, discourses of size and pain-resilience were often deployed, such as:

'He was too big for me to fight'

or

'He didn't hurt me, just he was too big.'

In general, boxers were not forthcoming in reminiscing over these fights, whereas their successes were often recanted in vivid detail in the weeks following a bout. These men understand themselves as successful boxers who embody their aspirations to become T.B.E. I read their reticence and comparative silence as struggling to live through the pain of knowingly enacting their own subordination. The rupture involved in the decision to take a fight like this abroad was tangible for these men.

Silence as the expression of pain, writes Veena Das, demands recognition and response (1996). The boxers I work with develop nuanced understandings and interpretations of the violence and physical pain which they visit on one another in the gym and the ring. As they do so they call one another into being as relational subjects, rather than violently objectifying one another. The vocabulary of *sha* and *pila*, of care and *wa* (help), is a one of mutuality and dependence, but also of the *physicality* of boxing (see chapter 1 and 2). In each case the recognition of self in relation to others is central to this physicality.

The prospect who travels as a journeyman for the first time undergoes a different violence – complicity in their own subordination and self-denial. Those who travelled to lose for the

first time were often those most withdrawn upon their return. In 2015 Peter, a former domestic champion, took a fight in the USA. He was knocked out violently in the second round. Prior to the fight, I had asked Washington about Peter's chances in the fight and Washington had sidestepped my question:

'Yeah this fight is fine. The fight is OK.'

Afterwards, but for the one time I asked Washington, I never heard the fight discussed in the gym. The violence of Peter's loss was not only in the knockout. Rather, his silence calls attention to the rupture and pain involved in realising (both cognitively and in practice as he enacts the role of the "tough Ghanaian fella") his subordination. Whatever agency might be recognised in the work of international journeymen, this does not cancel out the subordination and the pain of the compromises they make. As Peter's case shows articulating agency as an international journeyman demands a rupture of previous aspirations and gendered sense of self, a rupture which is deeply felt. Understanding agency as contextually dependent and socially ascribed rather than an innate capacity of the individual (Laidlaw 2010) accounts for the ambivalence of Peter's experience, his simultaneous sense of agency and subordination. Peter's experience, like Abraham's, also reflects Ratele and Everitt-Penhale observation that masculinities can occupy both dominant and subordinate positions (2015).

For boxers who are less invested in their self-image as a boxer like Isaac, travelling to lose is an active route to success rather than a moment of rupture. For those like Abraham who are heavily invested in the constellation of aspirations which "T.B.E" represents, this moment of rupture and subordination is too challenging to accept, hence Abraham's refusal to travel. For those like Peter, the pain of that rupture is palpable in their silence. Where training equips them with a framework for understanding the physical violence and pain of boxing as care, it does less for the violence of un-making the self that subordination visits on boxers. It is this which Washington, Alloway and other coaches' lectures after training work toward - a refiguring of the moral context of losing abroad so as to mitigate the violence of subordination. By appropriating the discursive reality of "tough Ghanaian fellas" in the service of subtly different aspirations, subordination is re-appropriated as a route to self-respect and personal gain and boxers are recognised as agents rather than objects.

Conclusion

As boxers encounter global engagement and mobility as a real possibility rather than a fantasy, they face moments of compromise which de-construct their previously continuous aspirations to become champions with a winning record: to become “T.B.E.”. As boxers gain experienced, they become increasingly aware of the discursive reality of the ‘Ghanaian Boxer’ in a global industry and the structural inequalities which subordinate Ghanaian men and offer only partial inclusion in this industry. In response, boxers’ aspirations are routinely refigured and their agency negotiated collectively by framing actions in shifting discourses of success and failure (Laidlaw 2010). Agency in the face of pervasive inequality is neither total nor hegemonic – as achieving the ideal of becoming T.B.E would be. Rather, agency in these men’s lives is partial, contingent, fluid and creative.

When aspirational boxers encounter the reality of global engagement, they work to articulate themselves as agentive with reference both to local gendered forms, global tropes and in relation to the pervasive power dynamics of a global industry. This work is creative and practical (de Boeck 2004), and importantly does not necessarily revolve around fantasies of engagement and agency in the face of pervasive exclusion. Rather, the partial and contested character of boxers’ agency reflects the attendant nature of inclusion and exclusion in their lives. The gap between the possible and the actual (Weiss 2009) is both deeply felt and bridged as boxers refigure their aspirations and re-appropriate subordinate roles. This agency is not without a cost, however. The rupture required to reconfigure aspiration is deeply felt, and the corporeal risk of boxing abroad remains high irrespective of the aspirations it serves.

Perhaps this experience of inclusion-and-exclusion defines the appeal of T.B.E – that constellation of aspirations embodied by Floyd Mayweather - and is the reason that despite his flaws, Daniel remains integral to the boxing family. Fatiou, an experienced Benninoise professional who now fights out of the USA, explained this eloquently in a conversation about boxing abroad. Anna Ampiah had just suggested that if you can get plenty of money and give it away freely, you will be respected “like Mayweather”. Fatiou responded with the following:

‘There is only one Mayweather. Professional boxers in the world there are plenty, thousands. Only one is Mayweather.’

Perhaps, then, there remains analytic space for fantasy.

T.B.E

T.M.T

Floyd. The. Money. Mayweather.

T.B.E is (of course) not a person. T.B.E. represents the paradox of exclusion-and-inclusion overcome; aspiration realised rather than compromised. Admission that ‘there is only one Mayweather’ is acknowledgement of the violence of subordination in a global industry. T.B.E represents that subordination overcome. Given that he will never travel, Daniel’s aspiration to becoming T.B.E is not beset with the contradictions encountered by professional boxers like Fatiou, Isaac, Samuel, Peter or Abraham. His aspiration to become ‘T.B.E’ can be sincere precisely because it is unattainable. Daniel represents the enduring and powerful idea (fantasy?) that subordination can be overcome. In chapter five, I examine other ways in which the inequalities of an international industry are addressed by the boxing community. In doing so I consider how novel forms of embodied agency are expressed through movement on foot through Ga Mashie.

‘Champ!’

Walking the World in Accra

One afternoon, as often happened, I passed Joshua Clottey as I walked to the gym. Joshua is a former world champion who trains at the Attoh Quarshie; a man who reputedly earned in excess of \$1,500,000 per fight at his peak. Although now towards the end of his career, I was told that he “doesn’t get out of bed for less than \$50,000”. For context, monthly rent for a single room in Ga Mashie is around \$8. A few years earlier Joshua had lost a close match to Manny Pacquiao, who went on to fight Floyd “T.B.E” Mayweather in the hotly anticipated bout discussed in the previous chapter. Joshua is an exceptional athlete.

Joshua was running along the beach towards the bridge over Korley Lagoon, just over half a mile West of the gym. Vast quantities of plastic refuse had washed onto the beach during recent storms and piles of plastic were now being burnt on the sand. Clouds of bitter, choking smoke billowed across the beach road and I held my breath as I walked through each one. Joshua, dressed in shorts and a black sweat-suit trotted past me as I walked. I nodded a brief greeting as we passed and he nodded back. A few meters further up the road a man tending a mound of smoking plastic with a stick raised a fist and called out “Champ! Champ!”. Joshua raised an open hand back and trotted on toward to the bridge. Once there, having briefly emerged into clear air, he turned back into the pall and headed for the gym again.

Encountering a globally exceptional athlete like Joshua trotting through clouds of acrid smoke on the beach is not unusual in Ga Mashie. As previously noted, the Accra boxing family are globally engaged to an extraordinary extent. Many globally mobile athletes continue to train in this small area of the city and maintain homes and lives in Accra. Although they grapple with the inequalities of the global boxing industry as they travel to fight (see chapter four), the boxing family’s international mobility remains exceptional relative to many living in Accra. Ga Mashie has also played host to 8 world champions in the past 40 years, more

world title challengers, even more continental and commonwealth title holders and almost all current and former national champions. A sense of relevance in a global industry pervades as globally engaged boxers and coaches inhabit the everyday spaces of Ga Mashie. The juxtaposition between extreme global connection and significance (embodied by the figure of Joshua jogging through town) and the quotidian nature of these encounters results in a sense of global connection-in-place.

Others have explored a sharp disjuncture between the possibility of engagement with global flows and the reality of exclusion in African urban spaces (Weiss 2008; Geschiere & Nymanjoh 2000). As I argued in chapter four, the reality of global engagement for the boxing family creates different dynamics of connection, inclusion and exclusion. In Ga Mashie pedestrian encounters like that between Joshua and the man tending the plastic pyre lend a sense of immediacy to experiences of a globally connected world. Joshua was hailed on the beach because he is a world champion, yet this crossing of paths is nothing out of the ordinary. The exceptional yet banal nature of encounters like this creates a quotidian experience of global connection for people living in and moving through Ga Mashie. A sense of time-space compression which others have argued is characteristic of contemporary global capitalism and neoliberal economic policy (Massey 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000) is experienced in the immediacy of such encounters. This chapter explores lived experience of these (extra)ordinary encounters.

The association between Ga Mashie and the sport of boxing in Accra is so commonplace as to often be taken for granted – Ga Mashie is where boxers are from and where you go to visit the gyms, as the myth goes. Interrogating the self-evident nature of this association requires a framework for understanding place as more complex than a material location or container of certain people (in this case boxers). Sarah Pink distinguishes between ‘locality’ as a spatially defined, ‘material reality...which has particular qualities’ (2012: 24) and place as ‘an abstract notion of space that seeks to understand the multiple material, sensory, political and social processes that constitute the environment’ (2012: 24). Asking how Ga mashie is lived and experienced as a *place* of boxing and global connection allows critical purchase on the apparently self-evident association between boxing and Ga Mashie. Pink’s distinction enables an account of place as socially contingent and continually (re)produced, and as such of how a “global” world is imagined and lived in this particular locality. Attention to emic constructions of place in Ga Mashie reveal that place is saturated with tangible

connections to a world beyond the locality of central Accra. I explore this sense of tangible connection and relevance through the ‘constellations of encounter and experience’ that occur as people move on foot through the city (Hinkson 2017: 53). Experiences of a world beyond Accra emerge as a pedestrian phenomenon in Ga Mashie – both in the sense that they happen on foot and in that they are surprisingly banal.

Topographies of Connection

Accra has a long history of connection and engagement in transnational flows of capital, resources and bodies (see History & Context section of introduction). As such, an awareness of global connection is no new phenomenon in Accra. This resonates with Frederick Cooper’s criticism that while ‘globalization’ is often espoused to be unique to the latter-half of the twentieth century, forms of transnational integration and circulation have been a persistent feature of the last three centuries, particularly in West Africa (2005: 200). Cooper calls for specific attention to ‘what is actually new’ about contemporary global connections and their limits (2005: 213) and what emergent forms of power and inequality they represent and rely upon.

Accra’s history of global connection is immanent in the topography of Ga Mashie. Take for example the two former slave forts which bracket Ga Mashie at the West and East ends – James Fort and Ussher Fort. Their former protectorates - James Town (outlined in fig. 4 in red) and the Ussher Town (outlined in green) remain relevant and widely-used spatial descriptors, despite the two forts now lying derelict and unused. Colonial figures are enshrined in road names – for example Bannerman and Hansen roads are named after former British governors. Topographically (to name a few salient examples) Jamestown’s largest market is London Market and Brazil House looks over the fishing harbour. Brazil House is named for the Taboms – a group of freed Afro-Brazilian slaves who returned to Accra in 19th century and were integrated as clan into the Ga state, notably producing Ghana’s (and Africa’s) most successful professional boxer, Azumah “The Professor” Nelson.

Cooper’s point resonates here. Observing that global connection is sedimented into the topography of Ga Mashie is nothing new and certainly not a phenomenon of the latter half of the twentieth century. However, understanding global connection as immanent in

topography shapes contemporary experiences of Ga Mashie as a place-in-the-world. The striking contemporary international mobility and global engagement of the boxing family is understood through long-standing concepts of global connection as embedded in the topography of place.

In exploring how a sense of place-the-the-world is experienced in and amongst the topography of Ga Mashie I draw together two divergent literatures. I build on anthropological accounts of globalization which address the lived experiences of emergent mobilities of capital, the internationalisation of markets and flows of people on a global scale (Tsing 2011, Matthews et al. 2012, Weiss 2008). My analysis is also informed by a literature which addresses place-making as a dynamic and embodied process that occurs on foot (Ingold 2008, Pink 2008). While others have noted that pervasive global connection and mobility juxtaposes aspirations to the extraordinary against quotidian experiences of limitation (Weiss 2008, Weaver-Shipley 2009, de Boeck 2004), pedestrian routes and encounters in Ga Mashie make the reality of extraordinary achievement itself unexceptional, and in doing so make global relevance and connection an everyday feature of life in Ga Mashie. As I argued in chapter four, the reality of the boxing family's extensive engagement in a global industry make experiences of global connection, inclusion and exclusion across Ga Mashie more complex than an experience of exclusion in the face of seemingly pervasive connection and mobility (Weiss 2009).

Analyses of transnational sporting industries often consider how movement from peripheral locations in the 'global south' to industry centres in the 'global north' - sites where sporting labour is monetised and consumed (Besnier 2015, Besnier and Brownell 2012; cf. Esson 2013, 2014 for Ghanaian context) - shape experiences of global connection among athletes. As I demonstrated in chapter four there is a clear understanding of inequality between industry centres such as the US and Western Europe versus Ghana in the boxing industry. However, in Ga Mashie a sense of occupying an engaged node in a global industry rather than a peripheral migratory starting-point emerges as paths are traced through and around town on foot. The encounters that occur along and between these paths evoke a sense of global connection which complicates the north-south consumer-source industry paradigm. Ga constructions of place and the concept of *shilashi*, walking without a defined destination, are central to this experience of global connection. To walk through Ga Mashie, for those who share a knowledge of the immanence of boxing in its topography and among its population,

is to experience a space saturated with global connection, a place-in-the-world which is not only where athletes are from but where athletes are. In making this argument I first consider how constructions of place involve locating persons in space.

The Logic of Place

Ga Mashie is understood to be divided into several *akutsei* – technically “quarters” but regularly translated by my interlocutors as “areas”. Each *akutsei* relates to a Ga “clan”, identifiable by surname. Each *akutsei* also occupies a specific space within Ga Mashie. I was told that Accra consisted of 8 principle *akutsei*; *Ngleshie*, *Akanmajen*, *Sempe*, *Asene (Asere)*, *Abola*, *Otoblohuun*, *Gbese* and *Atukpai*. Each was founded by successive groups of Ga migrants to the area between the 16th and 18th centuries (Parker 2000: 10).²⁶

Boundaries between *akutsei* are not literally delineated on the ground. Rather, they are understood through topography such as a road or a particular building which is known to mark the transition between two *akutsei*. Each *akutsei* has a *Mantse* or chief and each *mantse* resides in a specific building – the *Matse palace* of the *akutsei*. A *Mantse* palace will be adorned with the motif of the *akutsei* and often the significant names of the clan. These palaces form nodes around which the topography of the surrounding space is associated, with neighbouring buildings and streets understood to be “under” one *akutsei* or another. Although these 8 *akutsei* constitute Ga Mashie the resident population of each *akutsei* is not necessarily of that clan. Rather, Ga people associated by name with a specific *akutsei* often live elsewhere. This mixed residential situation is augmented by the high immigrant population of Ga Mashie.²⁷

²⁶ Parker suggests that 7 *akutsei* originally constituted Ga Mashie, the above less *Atukpai* (2000:9-14). Additionally, my interlocutors described several further *akutsei* including those associated with smaller sub-clans, subordinate to the clan chiefs of the principle *akutsei*. During my research *Atukpai* was often considered one of the principle *akutsei*.

²⁷ As one of the poorer areas of the city where rents are relatively low and employment accessible (located as it is close Accra’s central markets, bus stations, industrial areas and fishing harbours), Ga Mashie has a fairly high immigrant population.

Akutsei are constituted both spatially and socially. Each is associated with a specific patrilineage, identifiable by a surname which is often literally inscribed onto the material of the building. As such, patrilineages are linked to specific spaces among the topography of Ga Mashie. *Akutsei* are neither space alone nor people, but are constituted by both. This becomes clear in naming practices. When asked what my Ga name is – Nii Akai Nettey after coach Washington (himself Vincent Nii Akai Nettey), the question that followed was often “where are you from?”. The appropriate answer was to identify that Netteys are from *Sempe* and if possible to point to the area of *Sempe* relative to the location in which I was being asked. This is all despite the fact that Washington was born and has always lived outside *Sempe*. Should I pass this test of citing my name relative to the space of Ga Mashie and the place of *Sempe* I might receive a vigorous handshake or a chuckle.

Beside the *akutsei*, Ga Mashie is also understood as simultaneously divided into *Ngleshi*/James Town – West of Bannerman road, and *Kinka*/Ussher Town – East of Bannerman Road. These areas are named after the Dutch and British forts, respectively, which still stand today. Although the word in italics is the Ga language name for each of these areas, neither Ga speakers nor Ga people show a preference for the Ga language name. *Kinka* always refers to the area that includes *Asere*, *Abola*, *Gbese*, *Otoblohun*, and *Atukpai*. Whereas *Ngleshi* can also refer to a specific *akutsei*, James Town always refers to the space of *Ngleshi*, *Sempe* and *Akankpajen*. Rather than containing one another, these names reflect a simultaneous and layered understanding of place in Ga Mashie.

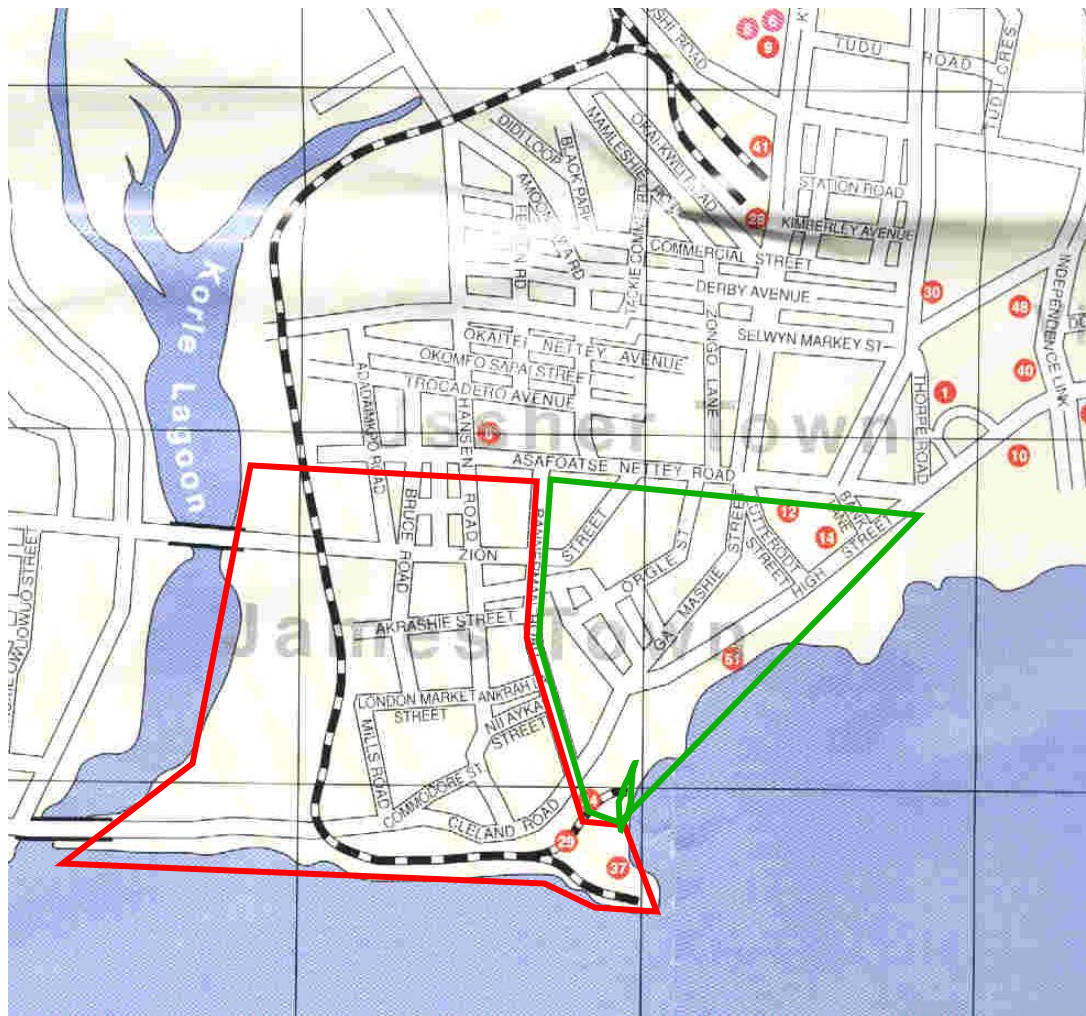


Figure 4. Map showing Ngleshi/James Town in red and Kinka/Ussher Town in Green.

Akustei, Bases and Presence

Walking around Ga and being taught the *akutsei*, I was guided through a number of places which did not conform to Parker's definition of *akutsei* as clan areas or quarters (2000: 10). Among these were smaller sub-clan areas such as *Tafo* to the North of *Abola*. Other places referred to as *akutsei* by my informants but not associated with a clan included; *Bukom* – the dusty square synonymous with boxing, geographically in the centre of the space of Ga Mashie, *Swalaba* – a residential area in *Gbese* in the north east corner Ga Mashie and *Busia* – a T junction between *Abola* and *Gbese* where a number of boxers, coaches and their friends regularly hang out around the Water Boys “base”. The “base” is a purple hand-painted sign

above two rough wooden benches, sheltered from the sun by a lean-to beside the road. The bench at the Water Boys base is strategically placed both to be visible whichever way one approaches the T-junction and to offer views up two of the three roads from the bench. Osman described a base as somewhere that a group of friends meet and spend time together. Whether adorned with an official title or simply a public space on the side of the road with a vantage point over a crossroads or up and down the length of a street, bases like the “Water Boys” are a common and salient feature of Ga Mashie. Bases allow people to occupy space publicly and to engage with pedestrians and passers-by. Sitting at a base, groups of friends and acquaintances not only talk amongst themselves but are publicly visible and call across the street to friends and acquaintances, who in turn stop for conversations or exchange greetings. Bases are a central feature of a social milieu which values public presence at a pedestrian scale. Their often simple and open design, and their location at junctions or on main thoroughfares allow them to function as a site of habitual public presence and engagement – somewhere to be seen and located, but also somewhere to see others as they pass. Bases, areas and the *akutsei* of sub-clans – places formed when space is associated with specific persons – are also made apparent in the material topography of the city. Often buildings have the names of their sub-clan owners or original occupants prominently in stucco or paint on exterior walls and bases are often brightly painted and adorned with the “nickname” of their occupants, much like the “Water boys” base.

Public presence is a salient and gendered feature of leisure time in Ga mashie. Men often gather publicly to hang out at a particular corner or on a bench of an evening or at the weekend. Allowey, the revered former head coach of the Attoh Quarshie, was regularly found sitting on a bench on the opposite side of the road to his house, where he read newspapers, chatted with friends, stopped passers-by and played chequers in his leisure time. Although not strictly a “base” in the way that the Water Boys base is, Allowey’s bench (like so many others) was a point of habitual public presence for the coach. Accompanying Washington or Osman on errands around Ga Mashie as I often did, we would regularly stop-by Allowey’s bench on the off-chance (perhaps more accurately the on-chance) that he may be there. We would exchange a greeting and Washington or Osman may discuss some matter of gym-business or the management of a particular fighter in the stable. Allowey, like Joshua, was a revered veteran of both the global boxing industry and the Accra boxing family. His habitual presence in the public space of the street, his willingness to engage with passers-by, friends, acquaintances and even those he knew relatively little of, is a mode of public

presence at pedestrian scale which is similarly achieved by the bases such as the Water Boys. Through bases and the numerous benches and informal spaces of public presence, the paths, roads and byways of Ga mashie are inhabited by the boxing family. The encounters encouraged and expected by this form of public presence lend to Ga Mashie a quality of the globally connected community present among the topography of that place

The space between Korle lagoon and the modern-day National Bank – the locality of Ga Mashie - is layered with multiple understandings of place which reflect Accra's complex history of migrant integration, trading and colonial interaction as outlined in the introduction. Persons, families, clans and other social groups are located in the material topography of buildings and streets, by name and clan associated with a particular place and by their literal presence among the topography of the city. Emic understandings of place emerge through the embedding of persons within topography – place is both social and spatial. This is most clear in the way that *akutsei* are constituted by a number of patrilineages, and as a result people are able to site themselves spatially in Ga Mashie by surname. However, a similar logic linking people to specific spaces also exists with the more colloquial use of *akutsei* as “areas” and bases. The Water Boys base at *Busia* anchors Obodai, Joshua, Ishmael and Korley (all Water Boys) to a specific location, and *Busia* becomes a place where the “Water Boys” hang out.

“The Water is in the Bottle”

One afternoon, having walked with Osman from the Attoh Quarshie in *Ngleshie* to the bus station beside the post office in *Atukpai*, I said goodbye to Osman before stepping onto the bus. I was confused (as perhaps the reader is at this point) by the barrage of names and places that had come my way as we had walked and I suspect Osman noticed this. As I said goodbye Osman took the water bottle I was holding and tipped it upside down in front of me.

Osman: ‘Look, the water is in the bottle, the water is in the bus station. The water is in Ga, the water is in Atukpai. The water is in Odododiodioo [the electoral constituency of Ga Mashie]. Where are we?’

I answered that we were in each and all of them. Osman agreed, and went on to highlight the importance of the presence of people in transitioning between demarcations in space and the concept of a place.

‘If you build a room and nobody sleeps there, is it a house? If you build a gym and there are no boxers, is it the Attoh Quarshie?’

The materiality of a space becomes meaningful – a structure becomes a house or a gym – through the presence of specific persons within and amongst it. Earlier that day Osman and I had stopped at a wholesaler of fish in *Gbese* owned by the family of Lion, a welterweight boxer from the Attoh Quarshie. Inside, Lion sat on a bench watching a kung-fu movie with his brother. On the floor frozen tuna sat stiff in steel pails and curved fins like scythes poked out of cardboard boxes. Lion took Osman and me into the freezer which occupied the whole building footprint and was stacked to above head height with boxes and pails of fish from two inches to five feet long. As we left, Osman said to me:

‘This is the real Attoh Quarshie. Lion, his brother and Isaac Sackey they grew up here in the house. This is the real Attoh Quarshie, they all started at the same time.’

The Attoh Quarshie is not the space of the gym, its locality or the particularity of its material reality (Pink 2012: 24); the concrete blocks, rusting steel tubes and stacks of old punch bags caked in thick, black dust. Rather, it is a place in so far as it is occupied and enacted. The Attoh Quarshie is not a place without occupants, occupants whose lives have been lived and shaped in that locality, on those punch bags and between the ropes that hang from the rusting steel tubes at each corner of the ring. Walking past the warehouse we encounter “the real Attoh Quarshie” sat on a bench watching a kung-film beside stacks of frozen fish, over a mile from the locality of the gym. This logic mirrors the concept of *akutsei* as places which come into being when space and location are linked with persons, and those persons with historical and kinship trajectories. To have a Ga name, to be a Ga person, is to be located in space, a space which is made a place by virtue of being linked to the clan of that *akutsei*. Similarly, the “real Attoh Quarshie” emerges as a *place* when persons, and their social history together, is sited in a particular locality.

Central Accra is a space layered with numerous places; places constituted by the presence of particular people and which relate to a specific social history. Building on this

understanding of persons as immanent in place, I argue that the locality of Ga Mashie becomes a *place of boxing* as it is inhabited in specific ways by the boxing community. The rest of this chapter proposes a logic of place which is not externally bounded but constantly emerging from the 'constellations of encounter and experience' which occur within that space (Hinkson 2017: 53).

Boxing Imagery

Ga Mashie is replete with visible references to boxing - pasted onto walls, daubed over doorways and scrawled on pavements in chalk. At Bukom Square, geographically in the centre of Ga Mashie and conceptually the centre of the place that is associated with boxing, there is a grey, sandy square with football goals at either end. In the South West corner are striking hand painted portraits of Ike "Bazooka" Quartey and Joshua "The Hitter" Clottey – both former world champions and two of Ga Mashie's most successful pugilists. Walking from my house in Korle Gonno to the Attoh Quarshie I pass a similar poster displaying the glistening torso of Obodai "The Miracle" Sai on the wall of a mosque – the first building on the road as you enter Ga Mashie from the west. The poster stands like a sentinel watching over the stock yards, the beach and the mouth of the lagoon just over half a mile away. A few corners north of here a similar poster (literally larger than life) shows Richard Commey, a lightweight world title challenger, fists raised and commonwealth title belt strapped around his waist. The banner hangs beside the alley that leads to the Bronx Boxing Gym where Commey trains. Otherwise unassuming walls play host to posters like these across town. The ubiquity of material culture alone does not create a sense of place nor a sense of global connection. However, the proliferation of this iconography of global connection – fight-posters advertising World Championship bouts in Las Vegas or pictures of torsos adorned with championship belts - is one way in which a sense of relevance beyond the locality of Accra is continually suggested. Place emerges in the everyday juxtapositions between these icons and those they iconize.

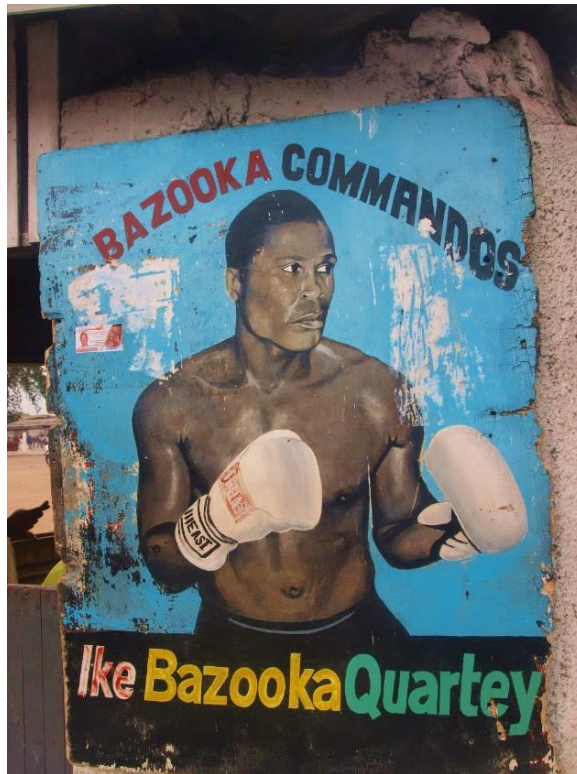
Shilashi: Movement as Presence

Up to this point I have been guilty of what Ingold and Vergunst criticise ethnographers for doing as they move through the field – of describing ‘what really counts’; the sites and locations which we pass between as we move (2008: 3). My aim has been to demonstrate that place is both a social, spatial and material referent in Ga Mashie and that occupying space publicly is a salient feature of my interlocutors lives. However, I now turn to consider locally constructed understandings of movement on foot, movement between and among the sites outlined above. Relatively few people in Ga Mashie own vehicles, particularly cars, and although many take buses, motorbikes and taxis from Ga Mashie to destinations further afield, moving around Ga Mashie is generally done on foot. DeCerteau suggests that ‘Surveys of routes miss what was: the act of passing by’ (de Certeau 1984:97), and likewise it is by passing through as a pedestrian that the boxing family becomes tangibly present within the space of Ga Mashie.

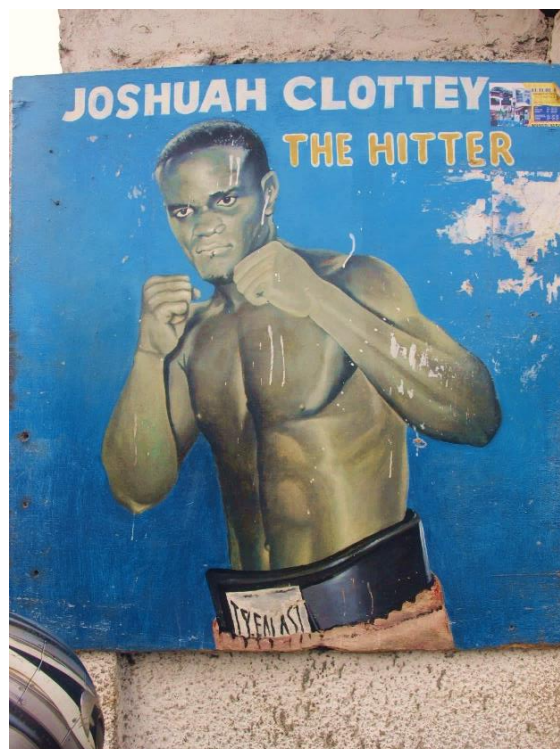
The Ga language distinguishes between *Nye* – to walk, and *Shilashi* – to walk around or wander through an area. Whereas *Nye* describes walking as a mode of transport, *Shilashi* describes moving on foot without a defined destination: walking as a process of presence. *Shilashi* does not refer to an embodied style of walking but to the purpose for which one is walking. *Shilashi* is done during leisure time, possibly at the weekend or the evening and is an opportunity to bump into or visit friends without invitation – either in the street, at home, at a bar or “base” or perhaps at their place of work. I spent many evenings with friends wandering around both Ga Mashie and Korle Gonno (the next suburb to the West where I lived), bumping into friends of friends and visiting “by chance” girls they were interested in.

Shilashi is also a way of hiding one’s intention or purpose under the guise of something equating a leisure-time stroll. “*Ngbe oya?*” (where are you going) was a common question faced by an individual or group stepping out of the house. Anna Ampiah, an Attoh Quarishie boxer, my neighbour and friend, advised me several times to respond to this question with the phrase “*n shilashi*” – I am wandering about. As a response, “*N shilashi*” finishes a conversation, invites no more questioning and is an accepted way of describing movement without a defined destination. On the occasion that one might visit someone and find them not there, neighbours or household members might tell you “*e shilashi*” which was often translated as “*he/she is around*” – suggesting a presence within the immediate area, but

without knowing where exactly the person is. *Shliashi* describes a presence in a particular area without purpose, at a pedestrian scale.



Portraits at Bukom



Shilashi is a mode of pedestrian movement which encourages chance (and sometimes less coincidental) meetings between people occupying the same space. Pedestrian movement and *shilashi* are a complementary counterpart to the forms of habitual public presence at bases, on street corners and on benches which I described earlier. While these sites of public presence are static, they are strategically positioned (beside roads, paths and at intersections) to engage with walkers. Static public presence, as I go on to show, only makes sense if others are moving around you. It is the contrast between circulation and *shilashi* on the one hand, and the public but static occupation of space on the other, which facilitates the chance encounters through which the boxing family inhabit and create Ga Mashie as a *place* of boxing.

Despite a lack of a destination, *shilashi* is not movement without purpose. It is a way of occupying space in motion, of being present and visible and allowing for the encounters and experiences through which a sense of place congeals (Hinkson 2017: 53, Pink 2008). The difference between *Shilashi* and *Nye* resonates with the distinction between walking as transport and as process which DeCerteau develops (1984). To move through space as a pedestrian with the expectation of encountering others, yet without seeking specific encounters, is a specific way of occupying space in Ga Mashie. Whilst the following sections do not all discuss self-identified instances of *shilashi*, the casual encounters afforded by walking without a destination constitute a specific way of being publicly present in a space.

Scales of Presence

Joshua Clotey, like many other financially successful boxers, continues to train in Ga Mashie rather than closer to his home in a luxury development on the outskirts of the city. Outside of training Joshua spends considerable amounts of time in Ga Mashie. He is often found of an early evening sitting at the “Water Boys” base or playing football in Bukom square. It is not unusual to pass Joshua or other successful boxers in the street, either walking or as they run through Ga Mashie doing “road work” as in the vignette which began this chapter.

Walking with Osman to collect his daughter from school one day, I asked why Joshua spends so much time in Ga Mashie when he lives in a different part of town, relatively far away. Osman explained that Joshua has several expensive cars and that he could drive through town to training and then leave immediately and go home if he wanted to. However, he chooses not to. Joshua prefers to walk through Ga Mashie, to sit with his friends after training and to play football in Bukom at the weekends. To walk through town rather than drive and to be around Ga Mashie on foot is a deliberate choice. Osman explained that if you drive through Ga Mashie in a car “people will not see you”, although they may know who is in the car. Similarly, from a car you cannot stop and engage with people easily and people cannot engage with the driven person. Finally, to drive through town is to assert a sense of superiority over others, given that cars are a potent symbol of wealth and power (see chapter 4). Osman explained that to see Joshua walking and sitting around town made him happy; to know that Joshua “wants to be here”.

When Joshua walks through the town, plays football in Bukom and sits with his friends at the “Water Boys” base he is present in a significantly different way to if he were to drive through Ga Mashie. His presence at a pedestrian scale encourages the chance encounters in public which are central to the concept of *shilashi*. For Joshua, to be in Ga Mashie as a pedestrian is to make a statement of equality, a desire to be present in spite of the financial success he is widely known to have enjoyed. Joshua is aware of the importance of chance encounters and visibility as a pedestrian in making this statement. This is why he chooses to walk through town, to sit at the base with his friends, or to play football in Bukom square.

For Osman the car is a symbol of wealth disparity and an important part of boxers’ aspirations and gendered performance as chapter four showed. However, driving through Ga Mashie is seen as a particular form of sociality by Osman for a different reason which does not relate to the gendered performances discussed in chapter four. Moving in a car is a form of spatial segregation which at once conceals the driven from public view, allows them to look out on the world around them and maintains a spatial segregation between those outside and those inside the car. For Osman, the car physically separates the driven person from the place that they are moving through in a profound way. It ‘transfigures [the driven] into a voyeur’ (de Certeau 1984:92) who is disengaged and not present in the same way as if they were moving on foot. To drive through is a symbolic statement of difference; an expression of wealth and a mode of spatial segregation which prevents the interactional and creative elements of

passing through achieved by occupying space publicly at a base, a bench or during *shilashi*. Walking is not only a mode of transport between points for Joshua but is an engaged process of public presence. To move through Ga Mashie in a car, bus or even on a motorbike removes the possibility for the everyday engagements which happen as one walks – the waves, shouts, nods and shoulders-brushed-past in busy streets.

Two different sets of values intersect here; the value of the vehicle as an expression of material wealth and the value of public presence at a pedestrian scale in Ga Mashie. What appears to be important is not only the possession of material wealth, but what you do with it and *where* you do it. So far I have outlined ideas of place, presence and movement in Ga Mashie. I now trace a number of routes around Ga mashie with Osman, and pull together these ideas through the encounters and experiences that occur as Osman and I walk among that significant topography.

Walking with Osman

As Osman and I walked towards his daughter's school one afternoon we stopped on street corners to eat rice, to talk with his friends and at one point so he could show me how *Komi* (fermented maize paste) is packed by hand into maize-husks beside the road. Approaching Bukom we stopped to talk with a group of men playing cards, several of whom were boxers. Passing Bukom, the sandy square which serves as a football pitch and is geographically in the centre of Ga Mashie, Osman pointed out the striking portraits of Ike "Bazooka" Quartey and Joshua "The Hitter" Clottey – both former world champions. Osman explained that the sand of Bukom square was where children played, fought and where boxing matches used to happen. Bukom was important, he noted, because coaches used to watch the children scrapping and bring the most promising fighters to the gyms to train

Passing Bukom, Osman pointed to a nearby house where Ike Quartey had grown up and behind it to Bukom Gym where Ike and Azumah Nelson, both former world champions, had trained. I knew this place already; Osman and I had attended several weigh-ins there together yet he still made a point of pointing it out. From Bukom we walked north east and passed the hand painted sign above the "Water Boys" Base. Inside the base is another life-size image of Joshua Clottey, this time "The Grand master" not "The Hitter". Next to the

picture sat Joshua, chatting in gravel-tones with his friends; he had walked there after finishing training at the Attoh Quarshie twenty minutes earlier.

As we walked by Osman raised a hand to the group and they nodded back, mirroring Joshua's interaction on the beach with the man tending the plastic pyre. Past the base, Osman turned on his heels and pointed out a house some 50 meters back towards Bukom – the house where Joshua had grown up and where his mother still lived.

We walked North East through to Swalaba to see Afloso, a promising young amateur from the Attoh Quarshie who would fight the next week. A few meters past the "Water Boys" base a vast cauldron of *Komi* bubbled over a stove made from a truck-wheel hub. Half-burnt logs protruded from a hole cut in the side of the hub and their acrid smoke mingled with steam above low corrugated roofs. As we walked through Swalaba we passed posters advertising an upcoming amateur boxing contest. They were everywhere at the time, the competition being two weeks later. The posters were red and white and I thought how several hundred jammed together on a wall made for an uncanny Warhol pastiche. Our walk was interspersed with calls of "Coach-eeey" and "Coach-ito", each of which Osman acknowledged with a raised hand or shot back with the name of the caller.

Enacting Place

I have walked this place before; past Ike Quartey's house, past Bukom Gym (empty like Bukom square save for a single frame for a heavy bag), past the murals and past Joshua's house. I have walked with coach Quaye – head coach of the FitSquare gym, with coach Korley – assistant coach at the Attoh Quarshie, with Washington, with Sowah, with Helen and many others besides Osman. We do not always go the same way and on other occasions I have walked other routes; past other houses, murals and gyms. In each case I notice familiar faces sitting by the road, banners of bare torsos, ring names and titles. Gym names are painted above otherwise anonymous doorways in once-bright colours, faded now in the sun. Often we are going somewhere in particular, perhaps the bus-stop after training or to a Friday morning weigh-in. Each time we trace a winding path through the alleys that criss-cross the dense blocks of housing between Ga Mashie's major roads. As we go the material referents and topographical features which pertain to boxing are pointed out to me and noted by those



Card players at Bukom

I am walking with. When walking with the boxing family the topography of the town - its buildings, squares and streets - become a material place of global significance. We walk amongst the homes, gyms and hangouts of world champions and title challengers who travel globally plying their trade against globally celebrated boxers – Pacquiao, De La Hoya, Hatton, Mayweather. They are those same opponents whose venerated images circulate amongst boxers on social media, and are tied to houses, gyms and otherwise unremarkable buildings and spaces in Ga Mashie by their Ghanaian opponents. A sense of being in a globally relevant place adorns the walls in the form of posters and gym names; is made material in the walls of the Bronx gym, the sand of Bukom and the structure of Ike Quartey’s house; and is populated as we casually pass boxers and coaches whose stage is a global one.

Richardson (1982) suggests that a sense of place emerges as people interact meaningfully with the material culture in a space. The material culture present in a space proposes a ‘scene or text...whose narrative we read...as we interact’ with it and around it (1982: 422). The buildings linked to boxers active on a global stage alongside the ubiquitous images and fight

posters work with the corporeal, pedestrian presence of the boxing family to create a sense of Ga Mashie as a place of boxing and global connection. Place is realised as paths are traced through this significant topography and in the encounters which occur along those paths and routes (Hinkson 2017, Ingold & Vergunst 2008).

As Osman and I moved across town I had wanted to take pictures to make a record, but on reflection perhaps I was misguided in this effort. It was not by seeing from a static or singular point by which I came to know this place, nor by which it is experienced as a place by Ga Mashie's occupants and the boxing family. Osman made this explicitly clear when, after several weeks of my persistently asking him why boxing was "in Ga Mashie" as it was so often described, he told me that I might learn by walking with him through town. To walk was to enact and experience the place of Ga Mashie as a relevant node in a global boxing industry. By walking Osman and I not only visit sites of interest, but relate them to one another spatially. Seemingly innocuous and unremarkable buildings become places as they are associated with persons; "Ike's house", "Joshua's Mother's house", and Bukom where children are plucked from street fights, brought into boxing gyms and go on to become world champions. Unassuming buildings, courtyards and squares reference a sense of global relevance – a history of fights in Las Vegas and London, Hamburg and New York. They speak of Champions whose prowess extends beyond the limits of the city, who travel to fight yet who remain present and inhabit that topography as they trace paths on foot or choose to occupy space publicly.

Walking is not only a form of transport around town. Rather, walking through town is *the* way of expressing and experiencing the presence of boxing in place. Osman 'appropriates the topographical system' (de Certeau 1984: 97) when he traces the immanence of boxing in the houses, yards and gyms we pass and as we move he links them together spatially. Walking among a topography engrained with a history of global engagement through boxing calls Ga Mashie as a place-of-boxing and of global connection into being.



Walking with Osman

If Osman was announcing place as we walked, he was engaging me in walking as pedagogy. Osman was teaching me to learn spatially rather than assembling knowledge from 'information obtained at numerous fixed locations' (Ingold 2010: 121). He was not showing me examples to demonstrate a point but was teaching me how the material fabric and space of the town constitutes its association with boxing and the wider world. By learning to walk the town I was learning how to experience and enact that topography as a place of boxing. Walking was a way of becoming knowledgeable about, and expressing a knowledge of, place.



Amateur boxing poster in Swalaba

So far I have discussed walking as a way of being present at a specific scale and of enacting a sense of place-in-the-world. Announcing this immanence and international relevance affirms the boxing family's own sense of global engagement; place is created in order that the boxing family may exist in and amongst that creation (Richardson 1982: 241). As Osman passes through Ga Mashie he is recognised as a relevant person in that globally engaged place. As people shout "Coach-ito!" across the street at him they affirm his belonging in that place and to that community. To be-in-place is not a matter of the place existing separate to the persons inhabiting it. Rather, the two are a single phenomenon (Richardson 1982: 421).

The Exceptional and the Everyday

As noted above, pedestrian presence as an act of placemaking affirms the boxing family's sense of belonging in Ga Mashie and of global connection. This is not limited to highly successful boxers like Joshua Clottey or Ike Quartey, but is also part of aspiring and less successful boxers' experience. Walking one afternoon with Washington from the gym to his house we passed the compound where Patrick "Yaw Mallet" Okine – a former commonwealth featherweight challenger, was born and grew up. Okine sat in the shade of the courtyard sipping from a water sachet and relaxing after training. On the wall of the compound, perhaps three times life-size, hung a poster of Mallet stripped to the waist with his two fists raised and his teeth bared in the broad grin. As Washington and I passed, Mallet waved and shouted Washington's name across the street. Washington shouted back "Yaw Mallet, Champion Boxer!" and we walked on. This moment is continually repeated across town: when we pass Joshua Clottey sitting beside a poster of himself announcing a fight in Las Vegas at the Water Boys base, or brush shoulders with Richard Commey beside a poster of the man himself adorned with a commonwealth title belt, in the passage that leads to the Bronx Gym in Jamestown.

The sport and its practitioners are represented in images across the town and implied in the material of houses known to be "Ike Quartey's house" or "Patrick Okine's house", but they are also present on foot; relaxing at bases, walking to and from training, doing road-work around town or sipping water sachets in a courtyard. The imagery of boxing is not a memorial to a past association, or a memory of now-departed migrants. Walking past Joshua or Mallet relaxing below a poster of themselves, imaginaries of global connection with metropolitan hubs like Las Vegas, New York and London are made present and tangible rather than being distant or inaccessible. They are grounded in the here-and-now when icons are encountered beside those persons they iconize.

This sense of immediacy is not only apparent when meeting successful boxers such as Joshua. One afternoon Osman and I walked through Ga Mashie with Emmanuel Martey, a young super-middleweight who had recently turned professional. As an amateur he had represented Ghana at competitions in Russia, Congo, Germany and Azerbaijan but had yet to be offered a bout abroad as a professional. As we walked, someone shouted from across the street:

‘Martega! Champ!’

Emmanuel stopped to look for the voice and from across the road came a man wearing a white t-shirt with a printed design on the front. The two men greeted one another and talked quietly before Emmanuel beckoned me closer and pointed to the t-shirt. On it was a photograph of Emmanuel’s face superimposed over a boxing ring, captioned with “Unstoppable Emmanuel”. In the image Emmanuel’s hands are wrapped and he looks straight into the camera. I snapped a few quick photos of the two friends before the three of us walked on. As we left, I asked Emmanuel about the shirt and he told me in a matter-of-fact way that the man is a friend:

‘He is one of my fans, one of my supporters.’

He said nothing more and we walked on, passing the Bronx gym and the poster of Richard Commey seconds later.

This encounter between Emmanuel and his friend is at once exceptional and expected. Emmanuel is not as financially successful as Joshua and at the time he had no titles to his name. Emmanuel is not yet exceptional in the global boxing industry in the way that others like Joshua, Ike, Azumah or Richard Commey are, nor is he exceptional as a boxer in Ga Mashie – after all he is one of many. Yet, Emmanuel is recognised as being part of a global network and industry. As he walks through town and happens upon ‘supporters’, he embodies the ongoing relevance of Ga Mashie in that global industry. With no losses to his name his aspirations to championship title bouts remain intact and sincere. He is, after all, the next big thing. T-shirts representing locally-recognised boxers are common and similar encounters between these icons and the boxers they iconize happen regularly.

It is the quotidian nature of this moment which makes it affective. Neither party is surprised to see the other, much as nobody is surprised to see Joshua sitting beside a poster of himself. By walking through Ga Mashie, *shilashi*, and public presence on street corners and at bases chance encounters like this are sought and expected by the boxing family. A meeting between the material idol (the t-shirt in this case), and the idolised (Emmanuel) is an everyday occurrence. Were Martey to be spatially segregated in a car he would be sealed off from such moments of interaction and micro-drama which simultaneously affirm both Ga

Mashie as a place-in-the-world and Emmanuel as a relevant actor in that place. To drive, as Osman described, makes moments of affirmation like this impossible.



Unstoppable Emmanuel

The exceptional is juxtaposed against the ordinary when walkers meet Joshua sat beside a poster of himself or when Emmanuel appears beside a t-shirt depicting him. Boxers from across the world travel here to train; boxers who compete at an international standard and who are broadcast from abroad on TV sets, at betting shops and followed on social media as they travel. These media of compression no doubt make the world beyond Ga Mashie accessible in a way it previously has not been (Besnier 2015, Weiss 2009). Yet, the compression of time and space that these media facilitate is only part of the experience of

global connection in Ga Mashie. The boxers represented by these media of compression are often also present at a bodily, pedestrians scale. Passers-by can see them and engage, can shout “Champ!”, share a greeting or clap an arm over a shoulder as they walk through Ga Mashie or pass by a base. The exceptional becomes banal in these every-day encounters, creating a sense of place which is globally connected.

Those boxers who have not yet reached international level – and perhaps never will – remain a tangible testament to Ga Mashie as a place-of-boxing as encounters with these potential future idols are equally as banal. The boxing family is revered and idolised on the one hand and engaged with in an utterly unexceptional way on the other. It is in the duality of these pedestrian encounters that Ga Mashie is experienced as a relevant and connected node in a global industry, rather than as a peripheral source of sporting labour, or a migratory starting-point. Globally exceptional icons are not only existent in the distant elsewhere of Las Vegas, London or New York, but *here*; present at the “Water Boys” base, slumped in a courtyard drinking from a sachet, jogging down a beachfront or playing chequers by the road. The myriad pedestrian encounters among a topography sedimented with boxing history congeals a sense of being in a place-of-boxing and a place of global connection. These encounters are facilitated by locally specific concepts of place as a nexus between persons, location and topography, and of public presence at a pedestrian scale.

Conclusion

A sense of global connection is experienced through a host of social relationships, inherited understandings and materials of varying symbolic significance in Ga Mashie. The interactional nature of walking makes it an important way of engaging with, living and performing this sense of place. To move through the town in a car, as Osman and Joshua demonstrate, would be to produce a different sense of global connection and engagement. How we move is an important way of addressing the way in which the local and the global are at once differentiated and mutually constitutive of one another.



Emmanuel and a fan

In Ga Mashie the exceptional is juxtaposed against the ordinary in everyday encounters between icons and the iconized. Boxers who compete at an international standard and who are broadcast from abroad on TV sets across town are also encountered in person as pedestrians. The boxing family is revered and distanced on the one hand, and engaged with at a pedestrian scale on the other. Global connection is not experienced as intangibly distant but in the banality of everyday encounters with iconic figures, among a topography saturated with connections which extend beyond the immediate locality of central Accra. The ordinary in Ga Mashie is a sense of globally exceptional mobility and achievement. At street level, Ga mashie is not experienced as a migratory starting point or source of labour. Rather, it is more akin to a “base” – a place or node of global of connection because it is populated at a pedestrian scale.

Belonging and the Ga-ness of Boxing

Leo: 'If you could make a gym with anything in it, your dream gym, what would it be like?'

Washington: 'It would be in Odododiodio constituency. I couldn't build a gym anywhere else, my gym would be here.'

L: 'What would be in it?'

W: 'It would have like 4 heavy bags and a speed bag, and one ring...maybe two rings. I don't know, it depends on the space... But it would be here in Odododiodio constituency.'

The salient factor for Washington in building his dream gym is not what might be inside, but where it is located - in Odododiodio constituency, the electoral constituency made up of Ga Mashie and a some of the industrial area to the north. Washington's words refer to the widespread understanding in Ghana that boxing is synonymous with Ga Mashie and the Ga people (Dunzendorfer 2011, 2014; Akyeampong 2002). This chapter examines how the boxing family engage with the sport's popular ethnic inflection, and considers how a sense of belonging is articulated between the boxing family and Ga Mashie. This sense of belonging is inherently political and requires the boxing family to articulate how they relate to the macro-imaginaries the state, the nation and the concept of ethnic groups.

I begin by asking whether ethnicity is a useful frame for understanding the association between Ga Mashie and boxing. Rather than deferring to broad stereotype that Ga people make good boxers, I foreground the specific ways in which my interlocutors speak about being Ga and the Ga-ness of boxing. I suggest that a sense of belonging between the boxing family, the sport and Ga Mashie emerges through practice in place, rather than being understood as a product of Ga patrilineal ethnic affiliation. I then consider how this sense of belonging is articulated and actualised during the funeral of Allowey, the former head coach of the Attoh Quarshie. In particular, I focus on the form of funerary procession called *Jama*

as a mode of embedding persons in place and articulating belonging. The boxing family's sense of belonging in Ga Mashie is part of a broader politics of marginalisation in central Accra which is often expressed through idioms of ethnicity. Tracing the boxing family's role in the funeral shows how they imagine themselves as a community of practice in relation to the state, the nation and the idea of boxing as an ethnic practice in the city.

Jama is a form of ritual group procession on foot which takes place as part of funerary rites in Accra. During *Jama*, groups circulate through and around a neighbourhood, moving in step with one another, often chanting or accompanied by music and carrying the body of the deceased either from the mortuary to the funeral, or from the funeral to the grave. The experience of *Jama* resonates with the concept of *communitas* (Turner, V. 1969) as an affective and heightened sense of togetherness formed through collective ritual practice. Belonging is embodied when space and topography are appropriated through collective movement to create a place-of-boxing, and embed persons within that place. The collective physicality of *Jama* is central to the boxing family's embodied experience of collectivity and community attachment to place (Turner, E. 2012). As such, *Jama* complicates recent discussions of autochthony (often of a particular ethnic group) as the preeminent way of claiming belonging in sub-Saharan Africa (Geschiere 2009, Akinyele 2009, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, Lentz 2013, Nugent and Locatelli 2009). Embodied experience, rather than descent, ethnicity or narratives of first-coming to the land is central to the boxing family's sense of belonging in Accra. This chapter builds on the argument of chapter five that movement among a significant topography is understood as a way of engaging with relations of power beyond the immediacy of locality.

Conceptualising boxing as an ethnic practice (Akyeampong 2002) creates a problematically static object by drawing an 'epistemic boundary' around the values and practices of the sport and linking them to a particular ethnic group (Bernault 2006: 207). "Belonging", by contrast, moves beyond the inadequately vague notion of "identity" (Cooper and Brubaker 2005: 59) and the problematic implications of reifying "ethnicity" as self-evident and static (Spear 2003, Nugent 2008, Bernault 2006:238). Thinking through the Ga-ness of boxing in Accra as sense of belonging recognises the continuous and processual nature of attachment to place, and among persons.

As noted in the introduction, the association between boxing and Ga Mashie occurs in the context of broader politics of marginalisation of Ga people in Accra. In Ghana, all land is

attributed to an ethnic group and consequently tribal and ethnic councils and chiefs retain some political authority in Ghana (Lentz and Nugent 2000). Much of the land on which Accra is built is Ga land (*Ga Shikpon*) and includes the six historically autonomous Ga towns along the coast, which are now integrated into the Accra metropolis (see chapter five). Despite Accra being notionally built on Ga land, Ga people as a minority group are not necessarily prominent in spheres of power such as politics and business (Robertson 1983, 1984). Furthermore, Ga neighbourhoods, particularly Ga Mashie and the adjacent suburbs of Korle Gonno and Chorkor, contain some of the poorest pockets of the city and lack the state infrastructure investment that other areas enjoy. As a result, there is a pervasive and underlying sense of disenfranchisement of Ga people in the city; disenfranchisement from a state which is perceived often to act as autonomous on notionally Ga land, and from political and economic spheres which are dominated by other ethnic groups, (Tsikata 2004; Nugent and Locatelli 2009; De Witte 2012).

Historically, boxing has been implicated in this politics of marginalisation as a trope of “Ga rights” movements, which emerged during intense periods of disenfranchisement in the 1970s (Dunzendorfer 2014). During my fieldwork, coaches and boxers often lamented that the Ghanaian state systematically channelled resources toward football, and offered boxing little support, and this was considered typical of the way that the state did not care for the Ga people in Accra. De Witte (2012) argues that the contestation of political power in Accra not only involves political representation, but the disruption of “traditional” Ga practices in the city. In particular, the ban on drumming and noise making enacted in the Ga towns prior to the annual festival of *Homowo* has become a site for contesting the authority of the state in Accra. The politics of belonging thus becomes a salient feature of the sensory experience of the city. Building on De Witte’s formulation of Accra as a politicised soundscape, I analyse the embodied and sensory experience of movement on foot through the city as part of this broader politics of marginalisation.

Constructing Belonging

The ‘myth of ethnicized boxing’ suggests that many (if not all) boxers in Accra are ethnically Ga (Akyeampong 2004, Dunzendorfer 2013) by patrilineage (Kilson 1974). However, after asking my gym-mates about their ethnic identity and family histories, I was surprised to learn

that less than half were Ga by patrilineal descent. I asked Washington about this and he explained that “all the boys here are Ga”, and others similarly insisted that the sport and its practitioners were Ga. I challenged Washington, citing those who were not Ga by patrilineage and he explained patiently that yes, maybe they were born somewhere else or maybe they didn’t have a Ga father, but:

‘The Boys who do boxing, almost all of them are Ga. Maybe Kofi was born somewhere in Volta region or Yaw was born in Kumasi. But they are all in this area, around Ga Mashie, they are boxing, they are Gas.’

Ethnic identity as a genealogical construct is differentiated here from the Ga-ness of boxing in Accra. Washington is not disputing that boxers are Ewe or Ashanti by descent and birthplace (as Kofi and Yaw respectively are). Rather, they are also Ga as boxers. Others have noted that ethnicity is malleable, processual and practice based (Schildkraut 1978; Fardon 1987) rather than being only inherited. However, Washington’s statement points to something subtler as he clearly differentiates between Yaw and Kofi’s ethnicity and their being Ga *as boxers*. The Ga-ness of boxing is not usefully understood as an ethnic inflection of the sport, but rather emerges through a nexus between practice, place and person.

Although many well-known boxers are known to be migrants to the city, they are still widely understood to embody the Ga-ness of boxing. Exploring what Ga-ness means in this context shows how ethnicity as a frame for this association is insufficient. Perhaps most notable in this regard during my research was Braimah Kamoko, a.k.a *Bukom Banku*, whose name combines Banku – a starchy, fermented food associated with the Ga people, and Bukom – the dusty square in the centre of Ga Mashie which is synonymous with boxing. The practice of using Ga places or elements of the topography of Ga Mashie in boxers’ “Guy Names” (nicknames) or “ring names” is widely prevalent. *Chorkor Banku* (a.k.a Raymond Commey) achieves a similar sense of Ga-inflection, this time in the Ga suburb of Chorkor rather than Bukom, as do *Bukom Tsatu* (Ga – Bukom Ant) and *Bukom Fire*. Strikingly, this naming practice is limited linguistically to Ga words and to places and elements of the topography in the Ga towns now integrated into the city.

Bukom Banku (Kamoko) is known to be the son of a Malian immigrant and a Ga mother; he has lived all his life in Ga Mashie and boxed since his youth. In the build-up to a recent fight, he claimed that should he lose he would no longer belong in Ga Mashie, and would return

(in exile) to Mali. This at once signals the immanence of Ga-ness in boxing and of boxing in Ga Mashie, whilst playing on the widely-held understanding that belonging among boxing community does not require one to be patrilineally Ga. By contrast, Ga as an ethnic identity in emic terms is defined by descent. This was widely recognised by boxers, who would describe themselves as of a particular ethnicity by descent but then echo Washington's statement that boxers were Ga, and they too were Ga. Again the Ga-ness of boxing seems to refer to something other than ethnicity as it is emically understood.

Kamoko is a virtuoso performer of boxing's Ga-ness; his public persona is built around a quick-witted and reflexive performance of what are widely understood to be stereotypically Ga attributes. These include his brash attitude, penchant for witty quips in the Ga language, his constant presence in Ga Mashie and his habit of speaking English in what many describe as a "deliberately Ga" way – as if directly translating Ga into English. This performance is carefully curated and often most over-played during Kamoko's regular TV, radio and online-video appearances. Mujere notes that language is a key marker of ethnic belonging and can articulate social distinction and division (2012: 125). Although the lingua franca of Accra is *twi* and the official language of Ghana English, in the Ga enclaves of Accra – the six Ga coastal towns of which Ga Mashie is one - Ga is the dominant language. Boxing is almost completely conducted in Ga – training sessions, weigh ins and formal meetings are conducted primarily in Ga, and secondarily in English. Migrant boxers are expected to learn the language, and those who struggle are gently chided by coaches and other boxers. The prevalence of the Ga language among the boxing community reaffirms the Ga-ness of the sport, as do Kamoko and others' carefully orchestrated performances of the Ga-ness of boxing, without implying an understanding of ethnicity through descent. Ethnicity as a static marker, or even as a participatory construct (Schildkraut 1978; Fardon 1987) does not reflect the complexity of Washington, Kamoko and others' understandings of the Ga-ness of boxing. Rather, while the Ga-ness of boxing and the boxing community is clearly a salient feature of people's experience of the sport, it is rooted in understandings of place and practice.

With this in mind, Washington's reaction to my persistent questioning of whether boxers were Ga or not makes sense. Belonging to the boxing community is acquired and reproduced through practice in place, rather than understood as a static ethnic identity. This might take the form of being perennially present in Ga Mashie (as in chapter 5), in the deployment of stereotypical tropes in public performances of Ga-ness, in the use of ethno-

spatial markers as is common in “ring names” such as *Bukom Banku* or *Bukom Tsatu* or through the exclusive use of the Ga language at public events and among the boxing family. Although the Ga-ness of the sport is clearly constructed and processual, these practices of construction are not understood as forming ethnicity in emic terms.

The boxing family are clearly aware of the sport’s Ga-ness as processual and constructed. Kamoko embodies this reflexivity when he plays with the concept of self-imposed exile and in his exaggerated and stylized embodiment of the Ga-ness of the sport, and he is one of many who play on these tropes. I now explore this sense of Ga-ness and belonging as politically engaged through a consideration of the burial and commemoration of coach Allowey. This is, of course, not the only instance in which belonging is articulated. However, my ethnography explores the proposition that the Ga-ness of boxing is an embodied phenomenon and that embodied movement is politically engaged.

The Death of a Coach

At the time that Allowey entered the sport, Ghana boxing was as usual proudly lifting the flag of the nation in international sporting circles. Allowey unearthed and shaped the talents of scores of young fighters who blossomed into world champions...He diligently served Ghana Boxing for almost forty years. To say that he will be sorely missed is an understatement. He is, simply put, irreplaceable.

Peter Zwennes, President of the Ghana Boxing Authority

Dedication at the funeral of ‘Allowey’ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey

In January of 2016 Allowey, then head coach of the Attoh Quarshie, died at his home beside Salaga market in the east of Ga Mashie. As the above dedication suggests, Allowey was the preeminent boxing coach of his generation. Following his death, rumours spread that a state funeral at the 40,000-seat national stadium had been offered to the family. These rumours sparked numerous speculative discussions about whether a funeral outside of Ga Mashie, the stadium being two miles east of Ga Mashie, was appropriate and proper (see fig. 5). At the same time, a state funeral was considered a deep honour and came with the huge financial incentive of state funding in a country where large funerals cost tens of thousands

of US dollars (de Witte 2003; Bonetti 2009). The state funeral did not come to pass and Alloway's funeral was eventually held outside his home at Salaga market. After the funeral, Alloway's body was carried two miles East across the city and interred at Osu Cemetery, some 150 meters from the stadium which had previously been considered a problematic place to have the funeral.



Figure 5 Map of Accra. Ga mashie outlined in red. Blue square; site of the funeral at Salaga Market Street. Red cross; the National Stadium. Green circle; Osu Cemetery where Alloway's body was eventually interred.

The boxing family played a considerable part in organising the funeral and conducting the funerary rites. This section considers the political implications of the decisions they made, and why it was important that the funeral was held in Ga Mashie but the body interred in Osu. I first consider how a sense of belonging in Ga Mashie shaped rumours and discussions about a state funeral, before describing how this belonging was embodied and articulated through *Jama* during the funeral itself. As they contributed to organising Alloway's funeral the boxing family articulate the difference between the Ga-ness of boxing and Ga as an ethnic marker. The boxing family also positioned themselves as separate to, and critical of,

the Ghanaian state but part of a proud national tradition through their contribution to the funeral. An attention to movement through and around the city again provides a window into the relations of power which shape the boxing family's lives.

Funeral Planning: Imagining State, Nation and Ethnicity

Allowey was taken ill in February 2015 and was in and out of hospital from then until his death just under a year later. Before his illness, Allowey supervised training most days at the Attoh Quarshie and received a near-constant stream of boxers, coaches, promoters and managers at his home. He had coached in Ga Mashie for over twenty years, was involved in founding the Attoh Quarshie and had mentored and coached (at one time or another) the vast majority of Ghana's boxing champions of the last twenty years. Amongst the boxing community Allowey was hugely respected and well liked. Despite having become financially successful through the sport, he lived modestly in rooms attached to his mother's household next to Salaga market in the east of Ga Mashie. Like many coaches, he had never boxed himself but began coaching part-time due to an interest in the sport. By all accounts he excelled as a coach, mastered many technical skills quickly and quit his secretarial job a few years later to coach full-time. In his free time, Allowey often sat across the road from his house playing chequers or talking with friends, colleagues and passers-by. Allowey was socially and spatially rooted in Ga Mashie and to many he embodied the Ga-ness of boxing in Accra.

Following his death, Allowey's family convened weekly at his patrilineal "Family House" in Korle Gonno (one suburb west of Ga Mashie) – the seat of the branch of the Kotey family from which he was descended – to plan the funeral. As discussed in chapter five, patrilineal "family houses" are a feature of Ga society and locate persons spatially by name and lineage. Despite being his "family house" Allowey, like many Gas, had never lived there permanently but had lived the vast majority of his life at his mother's house in Ga Mashie, a mile and a half east of the family house in Korle Gonno.²⁸ Allowey was ethnically Ga in the sense that his father and the Kotey family are Gas. Customarily, funeral planning meetings are chaired by a "committee" often led by senior male members of the patrilineage, and are held at least once a week in the run-up to the funeral (Roberts 2011). Meetings are attended by members

²⁸ As noted in chapter five, this is not an unusual pattern of habitation in Ga Mashie.

of the extended family, both male and female, who contribute opinions on the funeral process to the committee during meetings and are assigned preparation responsibilities. Planning Allowey's funeral involved six weeks of family meetings, a relatively lengthy time period but not unheard of. As the funeral would be relatively large, significant planning and coordination were required. Funeral planning is a key space for consolidating family relations, yet disagreements can lead to deep-running fractures in kinship and other social relations (Boni 2010; de Witte 2003; Nave 2016). As such, the planning and negotiation of a funeral is a delicate process and one where much is at stake, as was the case in planning Allowey's funeral.

In addition to Allowey's family several senior boxing coaches were also present; Washington, now head coach of the Attoh Quarshie, Akesi and Asare, both head coaches of other gyms. The boxing community, led by the three senior coaches, contributed actively to the planning and took on specific responsibilities including organising *Jama* and arranging exhibition bouts for the wake keeping. Beyond this, the coaches conferred quietly prior-to and after the meetings with the organising committee although I was not invited into these conversations. It is not unusual for non-family members, often close friends of the deceased, to take on organisational responsibilities at a funeral. However, the boxing family took on a significantly larger proportion of responsibility than I had witnessed before. The unusual scale of their involvement is testament to the central role of boxing in Allowey's life.

Following Allowey's death, Ga Mashie, Korle Gonno and Chorkor were alive with speculation and rumour about the funeral. Discussion often centred around a potential state funeral and whether it would be accepted. Friends and acquaintances of mine, many of whom were not part of the boxing family, had long and heated discussions about whether a state funeral was appropriate, or whether it was better that Allowey's family and "the boxing people", as many glossed the boxing family, carried out the funeral themselves. It was widely recognised that Allowey's contribution to the sport was of national significance. As a result, discussions often juxtaposed Allowey's achievement in the global boxing industry and importance to the nation against the idea that, as one friend put it, "boxing is in Ga Mashie, it is for those people to look after the funeral".

I took these rumours to Washington, who explained that Allowey's family had not yet been offered a state funeral. However, a group from the Ghanaian Coaches Association - a body composed largely of the coaches from the gyms of Ga Mashie and of which Washington was

a leading member – had applied to the ministry of sport for a state funeral to be held at the national stadium. The association, he explained, were not all in favour of the proposal and it had been the subject of heated discussion during the association’s weekly meetings since Allowey’s death. Although he understood that a state funeral would dramatically reduce the financial burden on the family and was befitting of Allowey’s status as a person of national importance, Washington did not support the proposal and told me that neither did Allowey’s natal family. At a state funeral the family would lose control of the funerary process and both he and Allowey’s family were concerned that this would curtail proceedings to a single afternoon which would be unacceptable. In Washington’s words:

‘I think that maybe if they have it [the funeral] at the stadium, then it will all happen in one afternoon. The Government will decide how it goes, and then in one day it will all be over. I think the family want to be able to do things properly. If you do it there [at the stadium], it can’t happen properly.’

Washington is referring to the fact that Christian funerals in Accra tend to take three days, and that Ga funerals are traditionally held at the patrilineal “family house” of the deceased. On the first day, the body is moved from the mortuary to the family house, where it is laid in state. In the evening, a ‘wake keeping’ is held where the body is displayed publicly throughout the night. Guests wear red with black and gather to drink, listen to loud music, play games and socialise through the night. The “wake keeping”, I was told, was originally held to prevent the deceased’s body from being eaten during the night by animals prior to their burial at dawn the next morning. On the second day, often a Saturday, a commemoration service is held at the house, before the body is carried (often by a *Jama* group) on a circuitous route through the city to the burial site. There, after another brief service, the body is interred. The funeral party then proceeds (again often on a circuitous route) back across the city to the family house where refreshments are offered before the funerary party disbands. On the final day a Church service is held at the family house in honour of the deceased and is attended by the funeral party. Following the service refreshments are served and music played through the afternoon. The funeral party generally disbands by dusk and the funeral is over.

A state funeral would disrupt the three-day funeral process by condensing it into a single day, and would require the state to have control over the funerary proceedings rather than Allowey’s family. The rumours of, and application for, a state funeral highlight how the

boxing family negotiate their position as a community-of-practice in relation to the state, the nation and the idea of boxing as an ethnic practice in Accra. The argument, made by both the coaches and the public, that Allowey is deserving of a state funeral given his contribution to the nation show that boxing is clearly understood within a nationalist discourse. However, in the context of widespread frustration with the state's lack of support for the sport and the Ga enclaves of the city, the family and coaches who did not support a state funeral (like Washington) resented the state potentially instrumentalising Allowey's death for its own benefit. Asare and Washington noted the irony of the potential investment in a state funeral given the chronic under-funding for the sport in recent years. Criticism of the Ghanaian state is articulated here despite the widespread sense of nationalist pride, and the state is differentiated from the nation. The fact that the application for a state funeral was made by the Coaches Association was recounted in gossip as a claim by the boxing family over the right to decide *how* to commemorate the coach, against the wishes of Allowey's natal family. Here, a conflict emerges which recalls the parallels and tensions between the relations and obligations of kinship and the boxing family, which I explored in chapter three.

The next week it emerged that the application for a state funeral had been rejected. This simultaneously pleased those against a state funeral (including Allowey's family and some coaches), but was also seen widely as symptomatic of the state's chronic lack of support for the sport and, by extension, the Ga enclaves of the city. After some considerable debate and much negotiation outside the meeting itself, it was agreed that the funeral would be held at Allowey's house in Ga Mashie rather than at the patrilineal family house, as Ga funerals traditionally are. I asked Washington, Akese and Asare about this decision and Akese explained that:

'Allowey lived all his life in Ga Mashie. That is where he was, where his people were, so they decided that the funeral should be there.'

This decision again troubles the idea of boxing and belonging in Accra as being about ethnicity. Allowey's embeddedness in Ga Mashie takes precedence over an ethnically Ga form of commemoration. The Ga-ness of the funeral is again here much more about practice and habitual presence than about descent and ethnicity.

On the second day of the funeral Allowey's body was buried in Osu cemetery, 150 meters from the National stadium which had proved so divisive in planning the funeral. Washington explained that Osu cemetery had been chosen because:

‘Osu is where big men of Ghana are buried. Important people for Ghana like MPs, the media, big men.’

Burial at Osu Cemetery enshrined Allowey as a national icon. Osu cemetery is the most central cemetery in the city and is located between the national stadium, the national monument (Black star square), Parliament House and the Government Ministries district. Although Osu cemetery is in the Ga town of Osu, Osu does not have the same significant association with boxing that Ga Mashie does (again undermining the idea that the Ga-ness of boxing is an ethnic association). Rather, the Osu cemetery is surrounded by a topography of the nation, and as Washington’s words demonstrate this nationalism was the reason for Allowey’s burial there.

The process of planning the funeral is characterised by an ambivalence towards the state from the different parties involved (and in public discussions about the funeral), and a sense of continuity with experiences of Ga marginality in the city. Simultaneously, a fierce sense of national pride shaped the planning process. Throughout their role in the planning and negotiations the boxing family contest who has the right to commemorate Allowey, and in doing so imagine how they relate to the state, the nation and boxing as an ethnic practice. The state is ultimately rejected and criticised as un-supportive, the nation is valorised and the ethnic-inflection of boxing rejected in favour of an understanding of Ga-ness which places greater value on practice and habitual presence than descent. These dynamics of belonging crystallised as embodied experience during the funeral itself, as I discuss in the following sections.

‘Meebe woba Wole?’ *Jama* and Person-in-place

Allowey, like many in Ga Mashie, had a Christian funeral service which incorporated Ga traditionalist elements and took three days. On the first day (Friday), Allowey’s body was collected from the morgue and carried to the site of the funeral. There, it was laid in state and prepared for viewing. That evening family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances gathered to view the body, and socialise over drinks provided by the family of the deceased in the wake keeping. At wake keepings for members of the boxing family, exhibition boxing matches also happen. These commemorate the deceased’s involvement in the sport,

entertain those attending, and are an opportunity for boxers to pay respect to the deceased and their family publicly. As one Attoh Quarshie boxer put it:

‘He was our coach, so we have to fight to show respect. It is like, boxing was part of his life, so we have to show that at the wake keeping by doing boxing there.’

The exhibition bouts here serve two purposes; for the boxing community to demonstrate respect for the deceased, and to articulate the importance of boxing in the life of the deceased by making it present at their funeral.

The next day a Christian service was held at the house, before the body was carried to the grave in Osu. After interment, the funeral party returned to the funeral site for refreshments, before leaving in the evening. On the third day (Sunday), a Christian service was held in the morning at the funeral site, followed by further refreshments.

In the weeks before the funeral, people speculated casually about when the funerary rites would eventually begin, and when the burial would occur. Discussions inevitably led to the question ‘*meebe woba wo le?*’ – ‘when will we carry him?’. This refers to carrying Allowey’s body around Ga Mashie prior to and during the funeral in a specific mode of collective movement called *Jama*.

Jama is a running-step which occurs at various public gatherings. It involves a rhythmic stamping of the feet combined with running as a group, singing and chanting. *Jama* is circumambulatory – moving around and through the same space repeatedly. At a boxing match, a *Jama* group might move around the ring or through the crowd; *Jama* for a politician moves around the area that politician represents; and *Jama* at a funeral moves through the deceased’s neighbourhood past buildings and sites of significance in the deceased’s life, and often from the funeral site to the burial ground. *Jama* can be accompanied by hand-held percussion instruments which beat a specific, offbeat rhythm, which is contrapuntal to the rhythmic stamping of feet in unison of the *Jama* group moving together in step. The active-verb form of *Jama* is *Shi Jama* - to pound (*shi*) *Jama*. *Shi* likens the rhythmic stamping of *Jama* to the pounding of cassava and plantain to make *fufu* (a starchy food staple). *Jama* was described by my interlocutors as serving to communicate information to the population of a space (a death, for example), to demonstrate support and attachment towards a person and to show that a community is ‘together’ in some respect. These effects are understood in part through an attention to the somatic experience of *Jama*. Osman described one day how;

‘If you are doing *Jama*, it can make you do incredible things. A big person who could not run from here to the beach [less than half a mile], will run three or four hours in *Jama*. You can run, run, run for hours without tiring. It is like it gingers you, moving together.’

‘Ginger’ is a conceptual expression of a feeling of increased energy and endurance. Boxers and coaches in training would often describe how sinning or doing *Jama* as they ran together or trained gave an embodied experience of increased strength and energy. Similarly, Allowey described how the spontaneous *Jama* around the gym created a heightened sense of connection for the gym community:

‘They are celebrating being together, they are happy to be together as a gym.’

Moving and singing together during *Jama* creates a sense of collective energy and belonging akin to the concept of *communitas* (Turner 1969), the heightened sense of community experienced through group participation in ritual activity. Edith Turner has noted how shared movement and music are both important features of ritualised activities which facilitate *communitas* (2012: 43-55), and hence the concept seems useful in understanding the effect that *Jama* achieves. The shared physicality of *Jama* creates a heightened sense of being together as a group and an almost ecstatic participation in others experience. Simultaneously, this shared physicality creates a sense of group attachment and belonging within a particular place - the space through which the group is moving. It is this dual inflection of *communitas* and a sense of attachment to place which makes *Jama* the salient factor in articulating the Ga-ness of the boxing family during the funeral, and which is not reflected in descriptions of boxing as an ethnic practice.

What was unusual about Allowey’s funeral was the prominence of *Jama* in the funeral and the leading role which the boxing family took in the *Jama*. *Jama* took place once on the Friday between the morgue and the house in Salaga market where the funeral was held and twice on the Saturday – to and from the burial site in Osu. In addition, a *Jama* to announce Allowey’s death and the upcoming funeral was held on the Saturday a week before the funeral, during which posters of Allowey, rather than his body, were carried across Ga Mashie. Each *Jama* articulated Allowey as a figurehead of the boxing community, as a public figure of Ga Mashie and affirmed the belonging of the boxing community in Ga Mashie. Echoing the argument of chapter five, the *Jama* demonstrate the immanence of person-in-place through pedestrian movement among a symbolically significant topography.

To give an objective, view-from-nowhere description of the *Jama* would be disingenuous. I participated in each of the *Jama* alongside my gym-mates, and my ethnography builds on both my physical engagement and interviews about *Jama* and the funeral. Despite participating, I cannot claim to understand wholly my interlocutors affective experience during the *Jama*, given my significantly different background and life experience (Landry 2008: 62; Woodward 2008: 55). Rather, in describing affective experience I build on interviews and discussions about the embodied experience of *Jama* alongside observations noted during my participation. I now outline the four *Jama* which took place as part of Allowey's funerary rites, and analyse how they create an affective sense of belonging in place, and of the Ga-ness of boxing in Accra.

Before the Burial

The Saturday before the funeral, thirty boxers and coaches assembled at the Attoh Quarshie in the south-western corner of Ga Mashie. We were met there by Washington, Asare and Theophilus Addo, who had hired a three-wheel truck powered by a motorcycle engine. On the truck's flatbed was a rented sound system, the two hulking speakers dwarfed the driver who straddled the truck's little engine. For the next three hours we jogged in step on a mazy route through Ga Mashie, holding posters announcing Allowey's death and the date of the funeral. We processed in our training gear, our hands bandaged as if we would imminently be boxing. Behind us the sound-system blared afro-beats and Highlife, genres of popular music which are fast and upbeat. Washington and Theophilus dispatched boxers to carry the funeral banners into household compounds and shop-fronts to announce the death and the funeral. Inside compounds, they ran around courtyards in step with one another telling whoever was there that the coach had died and when his funeral was.

By one o'clock we had reached Allowey's house. Outside, the flatbed stopped, music still blaring. The boxers jogged in step up and down the street while the three senior coaches went in to greet Allowey's family. When they came out, the remaining boxers and coaches entered the house before trotting out to re-join the *Jama*. From there we processed back to the Attoh Quarshie. After circling the gym's courtyard in step for fifteen minutes more, the sound system was turned off and the *Jama* ended. Soaked in sweat and exhausted, the boxers walked home to eat and rest. The purpose of this *Jama*, I was told, was to announce the death to the town and announce the funeral date. This seemed strange as the death, which

happened a month earlier, was widely known. This *Jama* expressed the affiliation of Allowey with the boxing community, and in doing so was also an act of devotion and respect by the boxing family. The intense, collective physicality drew its participants together in a heightened affective experience belonging similar to *communitas*. Simultaneously, circulation through and around Ga Mashie rehearsed the embedded nature of both Allowey and the boxing family in that place.

The Morgue to The Funeral

On the Friday morning before the wake keeping, a larger group of boxers assembled at the Attoh Quarshie at 06:00, dressed in their training gear. A *Jama* was led to the morgue in Korle Gonno where we collected Allowey's corpse, then back through Ga Mashie and finally to the house at Salaga Market, where the corpse was prepared and laid in state. The routes we ran were reminiscent of those that boxers run through and around Ga Mashie and Korle Gonno when doing "road work" – the daily running they do as part of their training. This is no coincidence. Like the *shilashi* described in chapter five, road work is a conscious act of making present the association between Ga Mashie and boxing.

That Friday, as we set out for the morgue we first ran to Allowey's patrilineal family house in Korle Gonno. There, under the instruction of Washington, fifty or more boxers stood in the road and did combat school in pairs for almost an hour, kicking up dust as they shuffled in the sand.²⁹ Sweat ran from our bodies and the slap of leather on flesh filled the air. There were no rounds or clocks. Instead, pairs came together by mutual consent and did "combat school" - the light, controlled sparring we often did in training. The neighbourhood came out to watch and the coaches paced up and down, barking at boxers to control their punches and not hit too hard. They were aware that boxers risked injury and saw that many struggled to control the power of their punches in the affective intensity of the performance.

After this we ran through Korle Gonno past Korle Bu hospital, where Allowey had spent much of the last year and along the main road to the morgue. As we trotted, the group sang call-and-response laments which spoke of Allowey as "protector", "father" and "provider" and asked what they would do now he was gone. At the morgue we sparred, jostled, stamped, chanted and moved in step for another hour while we waited for the body to be

²⁹ Combat school is a form of low-intensity sparring, see chapter one for a more detailed discussion.

released. There, we were joined by a cortege of Allowey's natal family who waited to see the body released, but did not participate in the *Jama*. It is not unusual for family members not to participate in *Jama*, particularly to and from the mortuary. Washington described how:

'The *Jama* people, they are usually the friends and supporters of the person who has died. They do the *Jama* to show their support for the person, to show how much they love them in that place. So sometimes the family will do the *Jama* too, but mostly it is the friends and supporters who are doing the *Jama*.'

Here *Jama* is understood both as the enactment of the deceased belonging among a particular group, the 'supporters' in this case, but also as an affective practice of attachment to place; 'to show how much they love them in that place'.

When the body was released, the boxers crowded around the hearse as it pulled out onto the main road and surrounded the vehicle as it crawled back toward Ga Mashie. We went back via Allowey's patrilineal house again, before moving through and around Ga Mashie for an hour and eventually returning to the funeral site. There, the body was carried into the house and the *Jama* disbanded. All the while as we ran, boxers stopped to spar for brief moments before trotting on in step with one another.

From Ga Mashie to Osu and Back

On the second day of the funeral, prior to the Christian service held at Allowey's house, another *Jama* moved through Ga Mashie for three hours before returning to the house for the service. During this *Jama* the body was not carried, but rather training clothes were again worn as the group circulated through and around Ga Mashie. After the service, the boxing family carried the body in a coffin the shape of a boxing glove two miles across town to Osu cemetery. As we moved out of Ga Mashie and across the city, the *Jama* swelled with hundreds of new participants. At the cemetery, the *Jama* stopped and the party was met by mourners who had arrived by car. The body was laid to rest with another Christian service, before a *Jama* was led back across central Accra to the funeral site. A climax was reached when the *Jama* group, now joined by hundreds of others, was funnelled down increasingly narrow streets as it returned to Ga Mashie. The intensity of the chanting and stamping

increased as the streets narrowed and the feeling of collective movement became overwhelming.

As we approached the house I noticed three boxers moving beside me among the mass of bodies: Afloso, Joshua Clottey and Sakuum. Afloso is 15 and a talented amateur boxer. Sakuum is a novice who had joined the Attoh Quarshie a few months before and had never fought competitively. Afloso is apprenticed to a cabinet maker, and Sakuum works as a motorbike-taxi driver. Joshua is a highly experienced professional boxer who regularly fights internationally and earns exceptionally well (see chapter five). What differentiates these boxers is clear; they represent hierarchies of skill, experience, age, wealth and the division between professional and amateur boxers (each requiring careful attention to be recognised effectively). However, what brings them together is key to my argument. Despite their obvious differences, the three literally rub shoulders as they move together. What forms through *Jama* is a collective experience of community tied to place, an affective attachment which transcends otherwise important hierarchies. Again the anthropology of ritual and the concept of *communitas* are useful in understanding what is happening here. By transcending hierarchy and difference through the affective intensity of collective movement (Turner 1969), the unity and cohesion of the boxing family is emphasised and the vast differences between its members suppressed, creating an embodied sense of collective belonging.

The route of each *Jama* traced sites of significance to Allowey through Ga Mashie. We passed the houses of his wife's family, his mother's extended family, his former employers, his lovers (Allowey, I was told, had many), past the site where the Attoh Quarshie had originally been located, and stopped in the courtyard of the current Attoh Quarshie for twenty minutes each time. Doubtless we passed numerous other spots where Allowey used to stop, or the houses of his friends and acquaintances. Through the *Jama*, Allowey's immanence in the topography of Ga Mashie was announced. The boxing which took place throughout the *Jama* and at the wake keeping, the choice to dress in training gear, the active role of the boxing family in organising the *Jama* enacted Allowey's belonging to the boxing community and in Ga Mashie. This could not have happened in Osu or Ministries, the areas around the National Stadium. Doubtless Allowey spent time around these areas. However, these areas would not allow an articulation of the embedded nature of the boxing family in Ga Mashie, and Allowey within the boxing family. It now becomes clear why the prospect of the state curtailing the funeral and the funeral being "in the wrong place" at the national stadium were so problematic to

Washington and Allowey's family. To trade control over the funerary preceding and location, and with it the opportunity to articulate Allowey's belonging in Ga Mashie and to the boxing family, for the national pride of a state funeral does not reflect the pre-eminence of Ga Mashie and the boxing family in Allowey's life.

Belonging as an Embodied Experience

The boxing family articulate a sense of social cohesion through the collective movement and vocalisation of *Jama*, and simultaneously a sense of belonging in Ga Mashie. The Ga-ness of the boxing family is re-affirmed through the *Jama* irrespective of the ethnic background of those participating. Ethnicity as a concept cannot account for the subtlety of the experience of belonging as a boxer in Ga Mashie. Rather, belonging emerges through embodied practice in place, is reflexively constructed, and is understood to be something subtly different to (and co-existent with) ethnicity as an inherited or processual trait.

Drawing on Csordas' idea of embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology (1990, 1993), Geurts (2003) analyses the embodied experience of ethnicity in the narration of Anlo-Ewe origin myths, the Anlo-Ewe being an ethnic group of Eastern Ghana. Csordas argues that cultural categories are constituted and lived 'through and with one's body' in registers beyond the abstract or cognitive (Csordas 1993:147). Geurts asserts that the typical physical movements which accompany renditions of the Anlo-Ewe origin myth, specifically the act of curling up into the foetal position, are a 'somatically expressed...dimension to the condition of being Anlo-in-the-world' (Geurts 2003: 385). Rather than considering how the narrative or cognitive qualities of the myth articulate belonging or ethnicity, she asks 'what is experienced in terms of intuition, emotion, imagination, perception and sensation' about being Anlo through the physicality of storytelling (2003: 374). Similarly, the boxing family achieve a heightened somatic experience of belonging as a community in Ga Mashie through the collective physicality that *Jama* creates. This sense of belonging cannot be separated from the sensation, emotion and embodied experience of *Jama*. The Ga-ness of boxing, and its association with Ga Mashie, is performed and lived rather than being traced through descent or cognised through narratives of autochthony or tradition.

Conclusion

As they plan, negotiate and carry out the funeral the boxing family imagine themselves in relation to the state, the nation and the idea of Ga ethnicity. As they debate whether a state funeral is appropriate or not, their ambivalent relationship with the Ghanaian state becomes apparent, and echoes the pervasive sense of marginalisation from and suspicion of the state in Ga enclaves of the city. The *Jama* of the funeral traced the emplacement of boxing among the significant topography of Ga Mashie, actualising the association between the sport, its practitioners and the place of Ga Mashie. The funeral, not the burial, was the key site for articulating Allowey's belonging in Ga Mashie and the Ga-ness of the boxing community. Allowey's burial in Osu, however, reflected a commitment to the idea of the nation without requiring any of the funeral party to submit to the state's authority. Taken together and understood in the wider context of the politics of urban marginalisation in Accra, the negotiations over the funeral and the burial show the boxing family working out how they relate to the macro-imaginaries of the state and the nation. The funeral in Ga Mashie and the sense of belonging articulated through *Jama* is a rejection of the state's potential claim over the deceased and highlights the ongoing tensions between the marginalised Ga enclaves of the city and the state. The embodied sense of belonging articulated through the funeral is, in this sense, deeply political. Although elsewhere the politics of marginalisation in Accra has taken on an ethnic inflection (De Witte 2012), here ethnicity belies the complexity of the attachment between practice, persons and place through which a sense of disenfranchisement from the state is felt by the boxing community.

This and the previous chapter have considered the relationship between culturally specific forms of corporeal movement and the power relations characteristic of a globalizing world. I have shown that intimate and quotidian forms of movement respond to macro imaginaries of state, nation, a globalizing world and international industry. Decisions about when and importantly *how* to move represent more than a mode of transport from A to B; a means to an end. Rather, the banality of movement engages relations of power beyond the immediacy of the body.

Conclusion

This thesis began by analysing the way that boxers understand themselves as relational and dependent subjects because of (rather than in spite of) the violence of their sport. In doing so I considered how ethical life among the boxing family is other-orientated rather than consider ethics as a project of reflexive self-fashioning. Secondly, I considered how different forms of movement at both a transnational and corporeal scale respond to relationships of power and subordination of a global scale. Intimate and quotidian forms of bodily movement engage with macro-imaginaries of state, nation, a globalizing world and an international industry and as such, these forms of movement can be understood as politically engaged. Although I have presented these two arguments separately, they emerge concomitantly in the lives of the boxing family rather than being discrete. Boxing in Accra is a stage for each and all of these concerns at once. I now draw these arguments together and pull out the threads that run through this thesis.

A major theme of this thesis has been the work that goes in to making and unmaking subjects through violence and inequality. The boxing family recognise the inherently violent nature of their sport, and by doing so can work to socialise this violence. The violence of boxing is not denied or reframed as a form of non-violence, but instead comes to be understood as potentially affirming. Both physical violence (chapters one, two, three and four), and the violence of inequality on a global and national scale (chapters four, five and six) are neither necessarily objectifying nor do they always allow for subjectivities to be articulated and defined. Rather, the work of socialising violence – whether it is in the corporeal immediacy of sparring in the gym and the ring or the disenfranchisement of structural subordination in a global industry - recognise the possibility of subjects emerging affirmed through violence. This thesis has thus added nuance to conceptual understandings of violence as either objectifying *or* as affirming. The boxing family's work to socialise the different forms of violence which pervade their sport can only be understood by recognising the relevance of both of these positions. Throughout this thesis I have theorised violence as inherently ambivalent and social, rather than normatively objectifying.

Central to the boxing family's capacity to live through a violent sport is their complex conceptual repertoire for understanding pain and embodied experience. *Sha*, *pila* and *wo*

ehe reflect a nuanced approach to experiencing and inflicting pain which recognises its inherently relational and social nature. This recognition is reflected in the boxing community's constant somatic attention to the embodied experience of others. Consequently, ideas of ethical life among the boxing family foreground relationality and demand an attention to the self in the particularity of its relation to others. I have referred to this as an embodied ethic of being-with throughout this thesis. Building on the work of Veena Das (Das 2007, 1998), I have developed an understanding pain as a relationship between subjects, rather than between a subject and an object. The relational concepts of journeymen, prospects, championship boxers, the discursive reality of the "Ghanaian Boxer" (among many others) provide a language through which to socialise the violence of the sport as potentially affirming, whilst recognising the danger of objectification. These concepts address both the corporeal violence of the gym and the ring and the structural violence and inequality of the global boxing industry. In the mundane and quotidian process of training, boxers and coaches work carefully to manage the ambivalence inherent to their sport, and in doing so articulate themselves as ethical subjects.

With this ambivalence towards violence in mind, I have shown that practices and concepts of care are a central concern for the boxing family. Care emerges as a relevant concern in response to the violence of the sport yet, counterintuitively, violent practices also come to be understood as forms of care. Relations of care range in scale and form, and include the corporeal responsibility for others demonstrated in maintaining kinship relations; the immediacy of dependence between a journeyman and a prospect; the sense of frustration with the state articulated through the proper funerary care of the deceased; and the care taken to spend time in Ga Mashie as a way of articulating Ghana's position in a global industry as a globally engaged hub rather than a subordinate source of cheap labour. Building on the argument that 'care evokes the goods and bads' in a given situation (Mol et. al 2015: 13) I have suggested that care emerges not only in response to, but concomitantly with the objectification of violence and subordination. This is not to say that all violence indexes care, but rather that the two concepts are neither distant nor necessarily mutually exclusive. I have shown that an ethnographic attention to violence demands an attention to care, and vice versa. Thinking through care as more than benevolence or altruism highlights the immanence of harm in practices understood as care and complicates the idea of care as a normative practice of the 'good'. Practices of care pervade spaces beyond kinship (Klaits 2010; Henderson 2012; Reece 2015; Bourneman 2001, Carsten 2004) and health (Taylor

2008; Mol et. al 2015; Pettersen 2008). Attention to these less obvious fields of care allows for a more radical theorisation of what care is, does and can be.

Throughout the thesis I have also suggested that embodied forms of movement engage with and respond to relationships of power and subordination of a global scale. The boxing family engage with and experience a purportedly 'globalizing world' through the immediacy of embodied experience, often in the form of movement on foot or in encounters with the (im)possibility of global mobility. Dynamics of global connection, integration and exclusion like those explored throughout this thesis challenge anthropologists 'by representing the most fundamental question of our craft: how do human beings construct their intimate, every-day lifeworlds at the shifting intersection of here, there and everywhere?' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 295). In responding to this challenge, I have followed phenomenologically inspired anthropologists who call for attention to somatic experience as the ground of meaning (Csordas 1990, 1993; Jackson 1989). Although the question of how this world is lived has been widely addressed by anthropologists (cf. Tsing 2005; Geschiere 2009, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999), I argue that attention to embodied forms of movement as creative acts of annunciation (Ingold & Vergunst 2008; deCerteau 1984) offers a new perspective on what it means to live in a globalizing world.

Connection, Inclusion and Exclusion

I now consider how the threads I have drawn out above collectively speak to the concept of connection on the one hand, and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion on the other, before reflecting on the difference between these concepts in light of my ethnography. What does it mean to be connected to others, and how does the fact (or lack) of connection relate to the power dynamics which shape experiences of exclusions and inclusion?

Work in the gym and the ring demands an attention to others' somatic experience. Ethical and effective training requires recognition of others' pain and suffering and boxers and coaches attend to one another's embodied experience rather than ignore or deny it. Similarly, the collective movement of boxers through Ga Mashie during *Jama*, or the encounters of *shilashi* that occur among Ga Mashie's topography of boxing, are experienced as a cumulative effect across and between bodies. In neither case is embodied experience

singular, individual or isolated. Rather, corporeal experience is shared and connected, and the boxing community actively cultivate a capacity to feel with and for others.

However, to be connected is not necessarily to be included. To deny the somatic connectedness of the gym and refuse to recognise another's pain results in exclusion from the care and mutuality of the boxing family. This is clear in the ethical imperative that boxers recognise pain and violence as a shared experience which I explore in chapters one and two. Inclusion is not predicated on connection alone, but on the capacity to recognise connection effectively and respond appropriately to others. Inclusion in the boxing family is thus not only about being present among others but being *with* others as a cultivated attention toward the connectedness of being.

As this intercorporeal attention (Csordas 2008) suggests, connection and disconnection do not simply correlate with dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. To disconnect can be an act of power whilst to have a connection severed by another - to be disconnected - is to be subjected to power. In their engagements with the macro-imaginaries of a global industry, the nation and the state boxers struggle with what it means to be included and/or excluded in a world perceived to be vastly connected. The authority to include, which often seems so distant in boxers' engagements with a global industry, is contested through quotidian forms of movement and practices of gendered self-fashioning. Despite the partial and unequal nature of boxers' encounters with the nation, the state and a seemingly globally connected world, the boxing family creatively re-frame their engagements and opportunities in order to articulate a sense of agency and claim inclusion – in a global industry for instance (see chapter four and five) – or exclusion – from the authority of the state (see chapter six) – from a position of power rather than subordination.

Gendered subjectivity and experience are also sites for contesting who gets to define the terms of inclusion and exclusion. Boxers reject terms of inclusion which they perceive to be unfair and work to reshape exclusion as a claim to agency rather than as subordination (see chapter four and five). This is patently clear as Isaac refigures his role as a journeyman whose work in the ring affords him the cash to build his church, rather than consigning him to the subordinate position of a losing boxer. Creatively authoring new networks of symbolic connection - here between boxing, masculinity and the church - subverts the dynamics which include Isaac in a global industry only as a subordinate. Likewise, Abraham actively excludes himself from a relationship of inequality as an act of agency and rejection of a global

economy which defines him as subordinate. To exclude oneself - to disconnect - is agentic for Abraham. Conversely, Daniel claims inclusion in a global industry despite his lack of mobility and connection by leveraging the resources available to him, namely his work and financial stability as a market trader, to produce a carefully curated performance of aspiration. In doing so, he redefines exclusion from global mobility as inclusion in a global community through aspiration. The boxing family contest the power to exclude, subordinate and objectify despite often being structurally subordinated both in the global economy and in the city of Accra.

Refiguring gendered success, re-articulating dynamics of centre and periphery and contesting the state's claim over Alloway's memorialisation are all ways of reframing connection as inclusion or exclusion, and articulating agency in the face of subordination. The boxing family go to great lengths to manage a life of connection and to achieve inclusion and/or exclusion despite inequality and subordination. The story of a more recent fight highlights the contemporaneous nature of the themes I have proposed in this thesis.

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Over a year after I left the field, I returned to Accra to talk through my writing with the Attoh Quarshie boxers and coaches. Midway through those few weeks in Accra, three boxers from the Attoh Quarshie – George Ashie, Issac Sackey and Obodai Sai - boxed on a card at the newly built Bukom Boxing Arena. The arena is not, as its name suggests, in Bukom but on the West bank of Korle lagoon in Korle Gonno. Plans for the new 4000-seater arena had been announced whilst I was originally in the field and construction began shortly before I departed. The project was funded by the state and commissioned by the NDC government of John Dramani Mahama. The Arena was opened in October 2016 by Mahama himself, a few weeks before the general election which Mahama's NDC lost to the NPP party led by political stalwart Nana Akuffo-Addo.

The timing of the stadium's construction was, of course, no coincidence. It represented a major investment in a chronically marginalised area of the city, playing on the nation's success in boxing and the Glamour of the sport to appeal to potential voters and appease the

disenfranchised population of central Accra. The name of the arena references the idea that Bukom is synonymous with boxing. The arena does not need to be *in* Bukom, but the arena needs to *be* the Bukom Arena in order to reference the Ga-ness of the sport and in doing so appeal to an area of the city frequently pushed down the government's list of priorities. As a politicised trope, the Ga-ness of boxing is deployed as a tool of appeasement by the state in a move which mirrors the politicisation of the Ga-ness of boxing which I discussed in chapter six.

However, the boxers who fought that night showed little concern for this politics. Their focus was, understandably, on the work in hand. Training in the build up to the fights was intense, each of the three boxers sparred 12 consecutive rounds several times in the preceding weeks. They sparred against a rotating team of amateur boxers, each of whom gave three rounds of aggressive "work" to their partner and were continually barked at by Washington, Osman and Korley to "*ma le!*" (hit him!). In between rounds, Osman and Korley worked overtime applying Vaseline and spraying water over the exhausted professionals. After particularly brutal rounds, the watchers outside the gym's windows applauded vigorously.

After each session, the four coaches assembled in the "room" and weighed the three who would compete. In the last two days before the scheduled Friday-evening bout, the three forewent training to rest. I saw them on the Thursday morning at the weigh in. They were hollow-eyed and their skin was drawn tight over their cheekbones as they had dehydrated themselves to "make weight".

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Fast forward two days: the day after the fight. Everyone at Washington's house had slept late. Washington's family and I attended the fights together and although their house is only a ten-minute walk from the arena, we did not get home until after 3am. All three Attoh Quarshie boxers had won their fights, and in doing so Isaac and George had become African Champions.

By 9am the family was slowly waking up when George and three friends walk around the corner into the courtyard. Chairs were hastily brought out and squeezed into an ever-shrinking patch of shade. A heavy, wide black leather title belt with a brass plaque engraved with the words "WBO African Title" rested on George's lap as he sat in the shade. He had headlined the card at light-weight, boxing against a South African opponent who had arrived

in Accra earlier that week. George's right eye was swollen and above it was an open wound two and a half inches long and half an inch deep. The wound was no longer bleeding but was weeping in the heat.

George had been cut above his eye in the third round by an accidental head-butt. From the third onwards Washington, Korley and Osman worked frantically in the minute between rounds to stop the bleeding, reduce the swelling and pack the cut with Vaseline to help blows glance off. Their work became harder as the cut opened a little wider with every subsequent round.

Back in the courtyard, Washington delicately shaved George's right eyebrow off with a single razor blade, and gently packed the cut with iodine-soaked gauze. He then sliced strips of plaster-tape with the razor blade, pinched the cut together and carefully taped over it. The operation was delicate, and neither man spoke as Washington worked. After Washington had finished, I asked why George didn't go to the hospital to have the cut stitched. He told me that he didn't want to, he prefers to be looked after by Washington.

Reflecting on the bout, Washington described how George's opponent was tough:

The boy [George's opponent] is a good boxer, so George did well to beat him. Now his [George's] ranking will improve so he can get more fights and maybe he can travel.

The boost to George's world ranking might pave the way for bouts abroad, title fights and possibly a rematch with his South African opponent. From this point onwards George's career trajectory has opened up, the possibilities for engagement with the global boxing industry have infinitely expanded. These opportunities also present challenges. George and Washington are only too aware of the power-dynamics that shape the industry and the reputation of Ghanaian boxers worldwide; both have lost abroad several times before. However, George is not getting younger. He is in his mid-thirties and Washington reflected that he cannot box forever so, perhaps he should make some money while he can.

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